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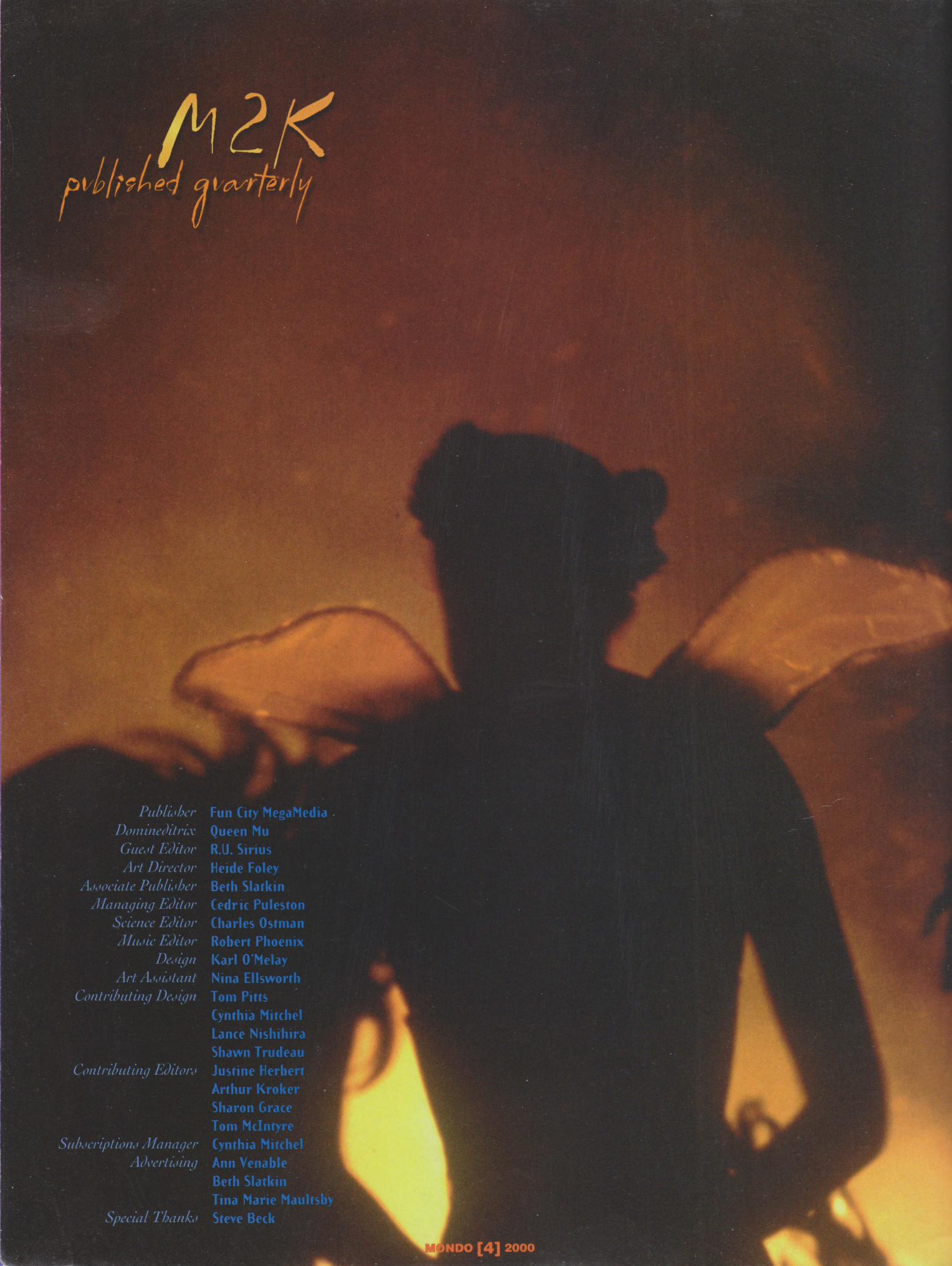
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subscriptions@mondo2000.com
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MONDO 2000
Issue 16, Winter 96/97
(ISSN № 74470 77997)
is published quarterly
for $24.00 for five issues
by Fun City MegaMedia
2645 Shasta Rd.
Berkeley, CA 94708

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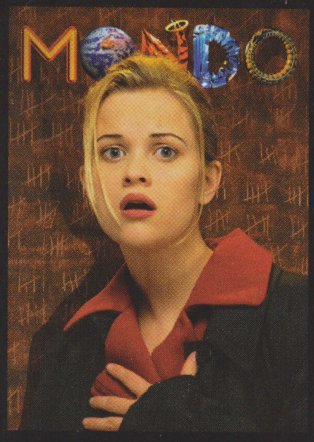
Application to Mail at
Periodicals Postage Rates is
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ON THE COVER it's **Reese Witherspoon**. I'd like to thank **Jonathan Perry**, Reese's publicist, for bringing her up from LA to **Liz Zivic's** studio. And thanks to **Karl O'Melay** for buying lunch and lending a hand. Thanks to **John Lucas** for hair & make-up and **Megan Foley** at **Coco's** for finding him. Special thanks to **Ladd McPartland** (my trusty assistant) and to Lloyd Whittaker (a friend indeed!). Thanks to the **Spy Factory** and **Sharper Image** for all kinds of surveillance paraphernalia. Finally I'd like to thank **Susan Brubaker** at **Armani** for Reese's ensemble. For more on Reese see the interview with *Mathew Bright* on page 76. Look for her next in *Magic Hour* with Gene Hackman and Paul Newman.

Photography: Heide Foley
Assistants: Ladd McPartland & Liz Zivic
Hair & Make-up: John Lucas
Coördinator: Karl O'Melay
Stylist: Miles Steuding
Production Assitant: Lloyd Whittaker
Studio: Liz Zivic, SF
Clothes: Armani



ON THESE PAGES: Thanks to **Jhina Alvarado** for the intriguing hatchmark painting we used as the background of our cover, **David Helmer** for his photographs on the bind-in and blow-in cards, **Barb Traub** for the mysterious silhouette photo on this page, **Nina Ellsworth** for Zeitgeist Piñata, **Hollywood Billiards** for letting Karl & me document Hudak's Hell, **Rob Magiera** for Sentience, **re: design** for Electric Minds, and **Omaha Perez** for Disinformation, **Larry Goode** for the illustration and **Tom McIntyre** for the photos in the William Gibson interview, **Dave Zarick** for Truth Machine, **Chris Hanley** for his photos from the making of *Freeway*, **Tim Hussey** for doing the art for Wisdom's Maw while stricken with the flu, **Steve Double** for the Drowned God photo-illustration which was sent subaquatically from England on fiber optic, thanks again **Mark Van-S** for **Sarah McLachlan** photos, **Linda Piedra** for The Photographer, **Chelsea Heneise** for the Yoko Ono and Perry Farrell illustration on the Contents page, **Hannah** (yes, *just* Hannah) for Robyn Hitchcock photos, and **John Westermark** for The Robotic Billfold. For more info on MONDO artists visit our web site at http://www.mondo2000.com

ON TOP OF IT: Copious thanks to our pre-press house: Mario, Sarah, Tim and all the great people at **Tulip Graphics** in Berkeley. Thanks for all the hi rez scans, quality film output and luscious matchprints.

Thanks to everyone who helped us out on myriad photo shoots. **For the Yoko Ono and Perry Farrell** conversation I'd like to thank **Audrey Strahl** of **Capitol** and **Roger Leonard** of Cloudbreak for facilitating, and **Rick Gershon** at **Warner** for actually sending me, and thanks to **Ladd McPartland** for going with. Thank you **Lorin Cole** for Perry's makeup, and **Hiromi Ando** for Yoko's. Thanks to **Kodak** for providing film, to **Meg Bowles** for coördinating, and special thanks to **Michael Phillips** of **Studio One** for treating us so graciously at the Dakota. **Fashion:** Thanks to **Heather McDonald** for her Speed Racer/Ninja photos, **Missy Miller** for the cosmically fortuitous use of her studio, **Todd Smith** for styling, **Zenobia's Nei Cruz** for hair & makeup, **Johanna** from **Look**, and **Mitchell** from **Ford Models**. We appreciate **House of Flys** for the **Black Flys** eyewear, and **James** from **Life Snowboards** in sunny, hot Laguna Beach. Special thanks also to **Kimberly Perry** for sending us gorgeous **TR8000** and **VXT-360** inline skates from **Roller Derby** and **TOUR Hockey**. To find out where to get your own, call (217) 324-2213. **Sarah McLachlan:** Thank you **Mark Van-S** for the **Sarah McLachlan** photos, and **John Hollingsworth** for assisting him, **Dan Nguyen** for hair & makeup, and **Todd Tyarm** for **Sarah's** necklaces (what necklaces?). It was also very nice of **Shauna Gold** at **Nettwerk** to send all Sarah's CDs directly to me. Me, me, me!

HEIDE'S LITTLE HELPERS: Well, as we are putting this issue out, it *is* the holiday season, and I have a lot of people I'd like to thank for being so, um, good: A very special thank you goes to **Karl O'Melay** for his generous help. Thank you, thank you, thank you, to **Nina Ellsworth**, the brightest pixel in the art department, Cynthia Mitchel for all her help, and **Tom Pitts** for stepping in at the eleventh hour with his sumptuous design of Linda Piedra's photo-homage (The Photographer and the Diva). Special thanks to **Rodrigo Xavier Cavazos** of **PsyOps** for his phenomenal fonts. Many thanks to **Fred Dodsworth** for being there. Also thanks to **Georgia Rucker**, **Anne Gant**, and **Kirsten Hively**, for letting Ladd & me crash at their apartments and raid their refrigerators, and thanks to all the people who attended my little soirée in New York.

—Heide Foley

photograph by Barbara Traub

CONTENTS







MONDO 2000 #16

12 GETTING IT DONE | Heide Foley

18 EDITORIAL | R.U. Sirius

20 IT'S HELL BEING ME | Chris Hudak

TECH FEATURES

24 SYNTHETIC SENTIENCE on DEMAND | Galen Brandt interviews Charles Ostman

38 EXILES on MIND STREET | R.U. Sirius talks to Electric Minds

45 cyberSPACE commODITY | R.U. Sirius submits to Carmen (humdog) Hermosillo



FEATURES

WILLIAM GIBSON | Live and Unmediated by Tom McIntyre 48

The PARANOID HOAXTER | Game Designer Harry Horse talks to Chris Hudak 56

The DISINFORMATION REVOLUTION | R.U. Sirius interrogates web gremlin Richard Metzger 62

WISDOM'S MAW | R.U. Sirius debriefs author Todd Fahey 66

TRUTH and CONSEQUENCES | Author James Halperin rubs Will Lohaus the Wrong Way 70

BRIGHT TRASH | Tom McIntyre talks to Matthew Bright, Director of *FREEWAY* 76

FASHION

84 GYRES & GIMBALS | Photos by Heather McDonald





118 SPELLS, SPILLS and SPEED | GAME REVIEWS by JOSH ELLIS and CHRIS HUDAK

126 The ROBOTIC BILLFOLD
Justine Herbert

MUSIC

90 GOTTA GET a RAINCHECK on PAIN | Perry Farrell communes with his idol Yoko Ono

98 The ART of CONTRADICTION | Sarah McLachlan discusses Fame and Fear with Megan Olden

106 ROBYN HITCHCOCK'S PRIVATE RESERVE | Robyn Hitcock opens up to Mark Katzman

112 The PHOTOGRAPHER & The DIVA | Photographer Linda Piedra Celebrates Lisa Gerrard

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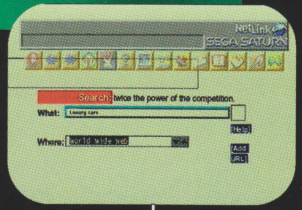
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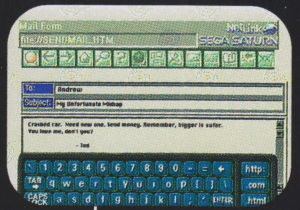
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MOUTHING OFF

Huzzah! Huzzah! This timely release of MONDO owes much to our small, agile, and intimate (not *that* intimate, mind you) staff. But we wouldn't have made it if not for the wonderful techno-toys bestowed on us by a variety of humans and corporations.



HP5si

Big thanks go out to Michael Lattig at Copithorne & Bellows. He got us our trusty friend Sasquatch—a big and scary, fast and sharp Hewlett Packard 5si black and white printer.

Speaking of quicker, there's the beta copy of Adobe's new Photoshop 4.0 (love ya, Sonya!) I can't say enough about it, so I'll just say a little. It's got grids and guides and a multi-function transform tool that does everything but vibrate, plus a nifty bird's eye view palette (Navigator) with remote control moving capabilities (without zooming out) and much, much more. It even provides UICs that allow you to instantly debit (ab)user accounts, depositing appropriately large sums into yours! Hah. Just kidding—but it does give digital watermarks. Now, how 'bout 5.0?



Adobe Photoshop 4.0

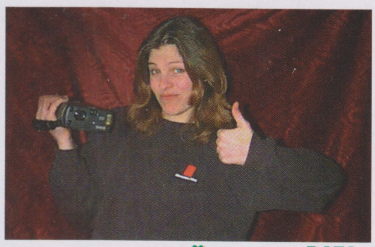
Benedictions on Sohana Park of Sterling & Cohan/SF for invoking the elusive PowerComputing's 225MH PowerTower Pro (which I just now also named Sasquatch). This hologram of Macintosh's soul is everything that Apple is, but faster.



PowerTower Pro

On the sweat & tears side, sweet songs to the software sages that visited planet Mondo: Sam Moore of WildRiver SSK, who showed us how to make digital fire, Mike Whitehead of ColorBlind, and Curt Hironaka of Fractal Design (who responded to our Ray Dream distress and kindly tutored Nina in 3D doodading), and Stephanie Arvisu for the details on Fractal Design's Detailer. If I had a thousand words I could thank Dr. Joseph Runde of Kodak and Valerie Pergande of Saphar and Associates, Inc. for providing us with our very own Kodak DC50... but a picture's so much more succinct.

Also thanks to Jeannie Bauer and Canterbury Press for their fiery fieries and loads of help. And thanks to all the discerning folks who said nice things about the look and feel of MONDO. To all you who sent nasty email—there is only one of you and you know who you are—whose thoughts I found annoyingly useless: if you can't write, do what I do, make pictures. And I already thanked everyone at Tulip Graphics — but I love them even more for introducing Mondo to the Agfa Chromapress toner printing process. Especially thanks to Tim Francis for his extra TLC, (may Loren grow up to be just like you!) and to Melne Murphy for the invaluable color correction tips.



Me with a DC50

SPINE DETAIL

And now unlike those other *spineless* corporate magazines, we call attention to our spine. You might view it as an itsy-bitsy (.25"w x 11.125"h) semiotic related to R.U. Sirius' editorial about the dissipating zeitgeist. It's a condensed little movie of Reese Witherspoon searching for it. If that sounds too pretentious for you, let's just say that it looks pretty cool, huh? and leave it at that. Actually MONDO takes credit for launching a whole new art form with it's magazine spines.

We take credit for a lot of things, and credit cards when we can get them. And we would launch a whole lotta more things, but our launching licenses were lynched. None the less, our art and design has sparked some notice. So maybe you are wondering what the trick is? One major dweeb kept emailing me about taking speed. I hate speed. As Frank Zappa said, "rots your liver, rots your kidneys, rots your brains, cucaracha..."

No speed. The trick, really, the one and only trick, is to have fun. I also try to incorporate text and image into a seamless whole. The distinction between my design and blatant imitations. is in the details. Actually, it's in the shadows (along with your mother, baby). Just ask my friend





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YOU ARRIVE, A STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND, CONFUSED, DISORIENTED, YOU MAKE YOUR WAY THROUGH THE TWISTED, SURREAL WORLD IN SEARCH OF YOUR PARTNER, MAX. ALL YOU CARRY WITH YOU IS THE KNOWLEDGE YOU'VE GROWN TO ACCEPT AS THE TRUTH. BUT YOU'RE ABOUT TO DISCOVER THAT WHAT THE TRUTH IS DEPENDS ON WHAT WORLD YOU'RE IN. AND IN THIS WORLD, THINGS DON'T NECESSARILY WORK THE WAY YOU MIGHT EXPECT THEM TO. THE CHARACTERS DON'T EXACTLY ACT THE WAY THEY'RE SUPPOSED TO. THE LAWS OF PHYSICS HAVE SOMEHOW BECOME WARPED. WHAT IS UP AND WHAT IS DOWN IS MERELY A MATTER OF OPINION. HERE, AFTER EVERY PERPLEXING PUZZLE YOU SOLVE, ANOTHER LURKS AROUND THE CORNER. AND AS YOU UNRAVEL EACH ELUSIVE MYSTERY, AN EVEN BIGGER ONE BEGINS TO UNFOLD. THE QUESTION IS, WILL YOU BE ABLE TO PUT THE PUZZLE TOGETHER AND MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE WHEN THE TIME COMES?

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Frank Czajaka who watched me at deadline for six hours manically trying to get the headline right on the Bob Ostertag illo two issues ago. And I will give away a brand new Lexus to the one who guesses the exact number of hours, minutes and seconds it took me to do the Martín Rentería fashion photoshopping in the last issue. I am always at this fuckin' computer. I'm here now, but you knew that. My fave design techniques are the ones that are invisible. Seamless. You might think it was part of the original image. Like the shadows on the tabletop in the Electric Minds piece or that wall in front of Robyn Hitchock. I did that dammit!

Ok. Ok. So now you know, right? And if I want my work to be invisible why must I brag about it? Huh? Well, I guess I just feel like sharing. So say thank you, Heide. Thank you for sharing.

And as long as I'm sharing, I'll tell you how I got those great shadows, like the one on the cover, or in the Gyres and Gimbals spread. Here's how I do it, using the PowerComputing 225 megahertz computer...

—Heide Foley

THE INAUTHENTICITY OF LIGHT AND SHADOW

Using **Photoshop 4.0** (although earlier versions will do the trick too), I start with an image cutout in **Layers** on a transparent background. The secret here is to define an edge that doesn't look like its been cut out with scissors. Using the **Pen Tool** I draw a path tracing the edges, and when I turn it into a selection I set the Feather to zero. Using the **Contract** filter set to 1, I save it to a new channel and soften the whole thing with a **Gaussian Blur** set at 0.7 before applying it to the image area I am cutting out of the photograph. This creates an really nice soft hard edge.



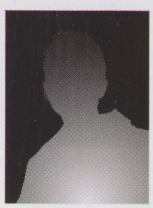




It's surprising how many artists don't bother with realistic faux shadows. Shadow needs vary, but my style this issue was to create a *trompe l'oeil* effect with an off-the-page light source casting shadows behind images.

On a new channel I load the selection I just made with the Pen Tool and using the **Gradation Tool** make, of all things, a gradation within the **marquee.** (The marquee is the outline of the selected area.) Voilà, a shadow.

To further mimic reality, I soften the shadow as it gets further away form its subject. To do this, I create a new channel and make a gradation that covers where the shadow falls off the figure. Then I simply load this gradation onto the graded shadow, use Gaussian Blur and blur to satisfaction.

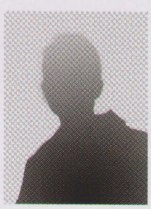






Once I have this prototype shadow I manipulate it into place behind the cutout object by loading it onto a new layer, filling with black and reshaping it using the **Transformation Tool**. Photoshop 4.0 has this new feature that allows you to **scale**, **distort**, **rotate**, **perspectivize** and **reposition** the image all in preview mode.

I distorted the shadows in this issue. I then scaled them down and perspectivized them flat.



One of the great things about 4.0 is that you can experiment without having to reload the marquee every time you want to use a new tool.



The final trick is to blend the shadow into the background by selecting **Multiply** in Layers and reducing the opacity to a desired effect.



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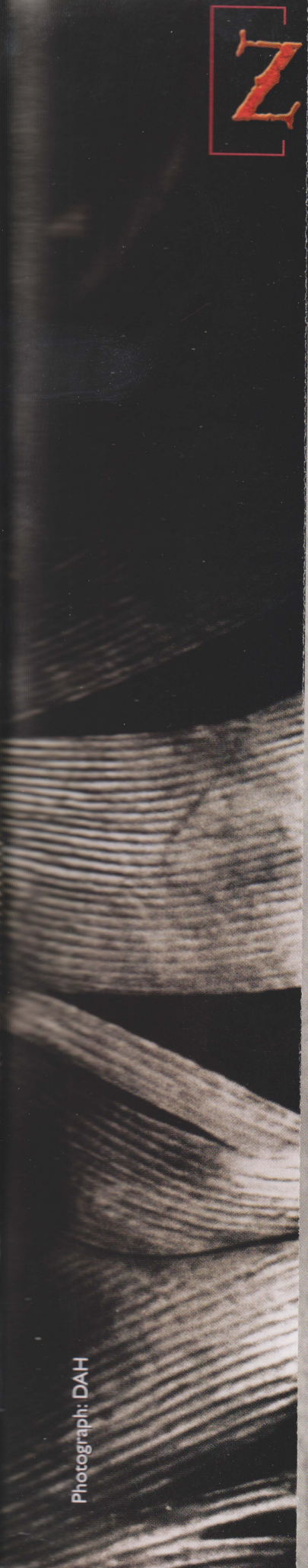
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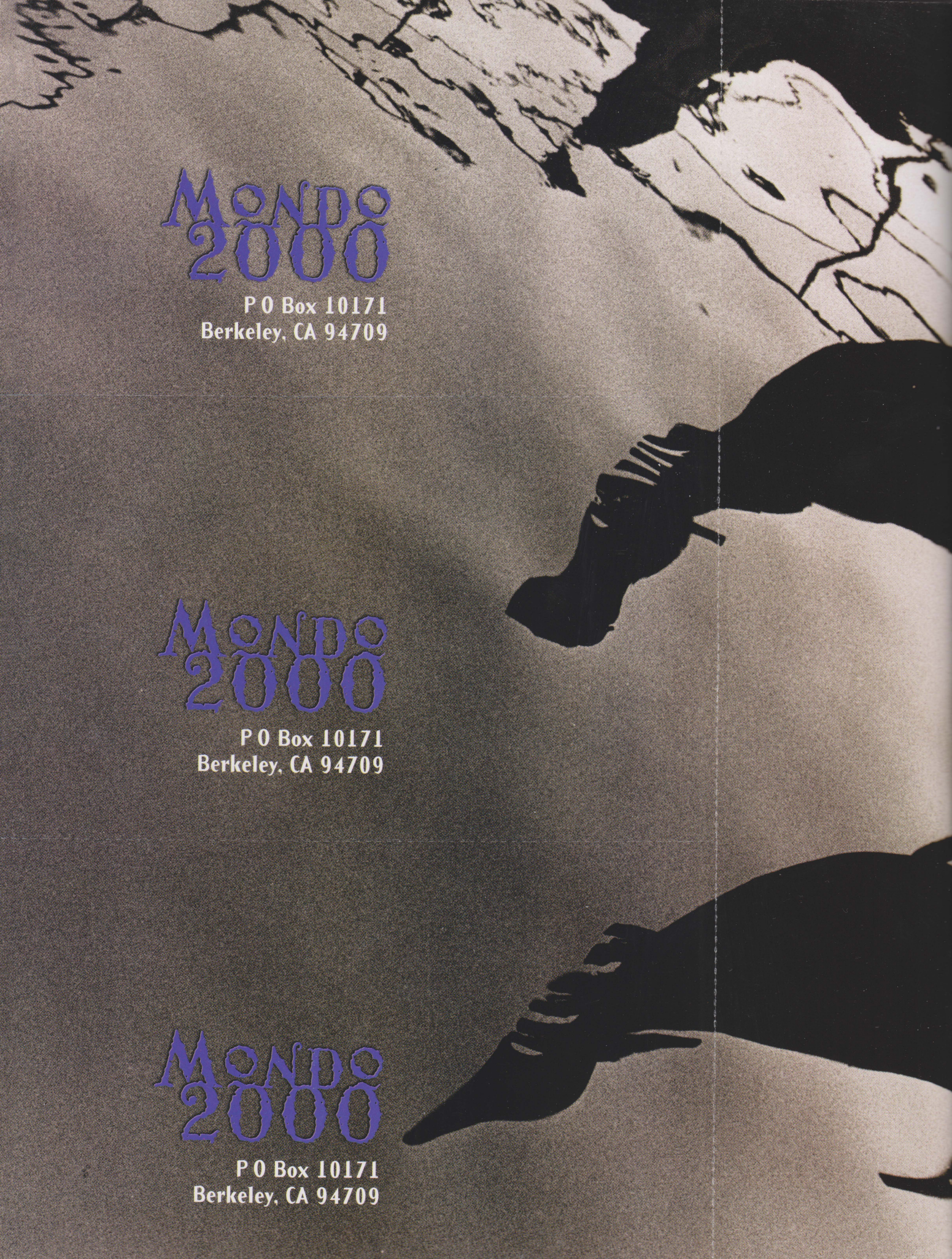
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Photo by DAH


SKEWERING the ZEITGEIST PIÑATA
BY R.U. SIRIUS

"MONDO 2000 IS A JOKE ON THE ZEITGEIST."
– ME, MISQUOTED IN GERMAN PLAYBOY 1990

"I ACCEPT CHAOS. I'M NOT SURE IF CHAOS ACCEPTS ME."
– BOB DYLAN, 1966

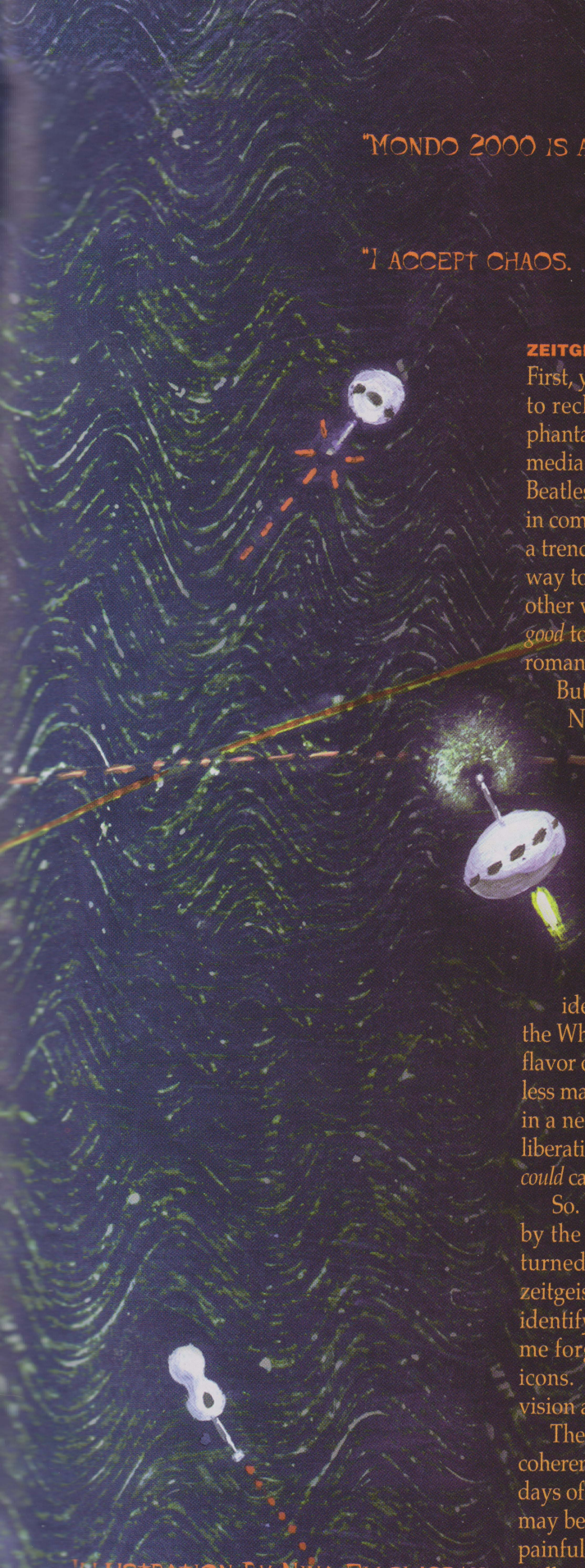


ILLUSTRATION BY NINA ELLSWORTH

ZEITGEIST? WHAT ZEITGEIST?

First, your psyche was colonized by broadcast media. Slyly attempting to reclaim this occupied territory, you made yourself plastic phantasmagoric, toying with mediated psyche and psychotidelicizing media. You *made fun*. Looking beyond the stylistic range wars—from Beatles to Sex Pistols, from pop art to cyberpunk—the one thing we had in common was that we had something in common. A trend wasn't merely a trend. A trend was a zeitgeist. Every change in fashion signaled a new way to wrap your mind around the world while having intercourse with other vital and attractive media whores, subversives and perverts. It was *good* to have a zeitgeist. There were bright and shining stars. There was romance. Poignancy. Destiny. It was exhilarating.

But then came the march of the Internet. And with it came Nicky Negroponte and the MIT Narrowcasters. Intelligent Agents. You found yourselves desktopped and given an infinite regress of your own trivial selectivity. Your psyche was now *Balkanized*. Deciding that only the trite is true, you tried to make a zeitgeist of banality. You packed your zeitgeist full of silly things—The Brady Bunch, !killbarney newsgroups, Hello Kitty fanclubs. It was an anti-zeitgeist really. A curtain call for rallying cries. A kiss goodbye to World Historic Generational Top 10 Revolutions. Branded with an X, it was nothing much.

Of course there was always the utopian strain. Letting your identity drift into the global matrix, raving till dawn, singing "We Are the Whirled." But it all rang hollow—Fruitopian rather than utopian—a flavor of the month lacking the backbone to give good zeitgeist to the headless mass. With "Love Is All You Need" signifying megacorporate mergers in a new world order and "Anarchy in the USA" bespeaking only the liberation of the poor from Government handouts, the *new* new age never *could* capture the zeitgeist or even twitch its palsied dendrites.

So. With attention decentered by the net, every passion commodified by the Time/Warner/Disney/Turner distribution chain, and destiny turned to ennui or a bad situation comedy, is there no great cultural zeitgeist for Mondoids, no new opportunities to be too far out in front of identifying what has *already* happened while nobody was looking? Give me forged histories. Ludicrous assertions. Naïve hopes. Spaced-out icons. Whimsical elixirs. Doppelganger technopoliticians. Time and vision all dressed up and no space to go.

The usual bag of tricks? Well, maybe. Or maybe there's a peculiar coherence for you to piece together, if only for your own amusement. The days of messaging might be at an end. The days of the shrouded allusion may be upon us. Slice open our aching and swelling head—already painfully over the edge of the world wide web of deceit—and the clues spill out. Zeitgeist piñata? The Truth is *in* there. M+2

it's hell being me

by Chris Hudak



Greetings. My name is Chris Hudak, and I'm a writer. Alcoholic. Whatever.

My business is words: What they say, how eloquently they say it, how they go together as they say it, and, above all, how much I get paid for them. That is my *business*, but I have a lot of trouble ever getting any business done because of this, this... this *lifestyle* I've somehow been sucked into.

For recreation, I shoot pool and drink rather too much, thanks for asking.

The purpose of today's piece is to serve as a warning: Do NOT get involved in contract work for out-of-town video game companies. If you do, you will have weeks, sometimes entire months, *exactly* like this:

GAME THEORY AND THE ART OF GETTING YOUR WAY NINE TIMES OUT OF TEN



Photos by RE:design, with special thanks to Kodak ds & their DCS 465 digital camera back

I get this wake-up telephone call, too early for somebody like me. It's 9 on a Wednesday morning, before the *sun* is even warm, and I get this call, and it goes—remember, I'll never lead you astray when it comes to words—*exactly* like this:

"HeyChristhisisMarkdown inL.A.,howyadoinLook,canyou beonaplanetomorrowmorning wewantyoutoworkonagamel'll havemysecretaryarrangeitall seeyasoon." *Click.*

It takes me a little time to process this, but I eventually figure out that I'm supposed to travel to Irvine, forgodsakes *Irvine* if you please, and work on a game. I'll spare you the details of most of the next coupla hours, as they largely involve me trying to thrash my way out of the leather jeans I'd fallen asleep in the night before.

Packing for an impromptu business trip means grabbing my PowerBook, which contains my brain, and my leather jacket, which contains everything else of value I own. After three years of trial and error and error (including that time I almost got shot in Japan, and no I *don't* want to talk about it), I have worked out just what I always need to have on the road, and have managed to find places in my jacket for all of it, to wit:

A microcassette recorder; a titanium bottle opener; a two-inch butane torch (*such* a way to light the ladies' cigarettes); a micro Maglight; a Spyderco locking Police knife, which cuts you if you just look at it the wrong way; a cellular phone (which I *absolutely* do not recommend that you attempt to use on a plane especially after they've specifically told you not to, and with—imagine my surprise—an FAA rep sitting right beside you); a number of spare floppy disks (for booting up in case of an on-the-road computer failure); a multipurpose, magnetized toolkit; a Walkman (for not hearing the aforementioned FAA rep, forcing him to tap you on your very surprised, very *busted* shoulder); a slim notepad (for when your $5,000 state-of-the-art PowerBook's battery dies in mid-flight; the pen cap *but somehow missing the actual pen*, for use with the notepad; an electronic Japanese-English translator (for those touchy situations, see above); a camera (for documenting week-long electronics shows that you would otherwise be too hammered to remember); a first-aid kit (because shit happens); and a number of other things which make for very long, tedious, grinding, slap-and-tickle sessions at the airport metal detector.

On the flight down we hit the worst turbulence I have ever experienced in my life, and I become convinced that, this time, I am quite surely going to die. On the way to *Irvine*. Wouldn't *that* just be the rat's asshole, *dying* on the way down to *Irvine?*

Mark picks me up at the airport. John Wayne, natch. He finds me in the bar wherein most of the bartenders have come to recognize me. (Did I mention that, months before all this, I was flying to Irvine every week? Well, I was.) Most times these days, after a week-long marathon, they don't even say hi—they just slap a big Long Island in front of me.

My mission this trip: Develop the proposal for a revolutionary new video game, the exact name and details of which escape me for the moment, on account of I don't want to get sued for breach of non-disclosure. This particular two-day jaunt consists of four distinct cycles of activity: Sitting back-to-back in a small, dark room with four other computer geeks—each facing our own glowing screens like techs in the torpedo room of a submarine—listening to the west wall, which is one huge speaker for a CD player growling loud industrial music; creating the backgrounds and silly names of a number of cool game characters; sneaking off to the break room to play *Tekken* on the communal PlayStation; and eating in jolly good restaurants, because taking his creative guys to cool restaurants is Mark's thing, and he is *very* good at it.

At the end of a day, we crawl out into the lighted office hallway, we blinking computer moles, and argue about what I've written; they're the artists, and turning my words into digital creatures is hard work. To fortify themselves for the grueling task ahead, they seek sustenance: So it's off to the parking lot to smoke a paralyzing load of weed. Properly fortified, somebody says the word "booger" and we howl with laughter for two hours.

Next thing I know, I wake up fully-dressed in my hotel room, on the floor, with (apparently) three hour's sleep, no memory of the previous night, and with one and only one crystal-clear thought in my still-reeling head: I still have six hours of writing to do, and I am in no condition to sing the alphabet the same way twice, much less create fantastic little creatures and their worlds. Why do I *do* this to myself? I'm comfortably numb, the larger horrors of the world have temporarily relinquished their hold on my thoughts, but where is the sense of creative focus? I look around the room, trying to will the dust-bunnies out of my head. The furniture and all the angles look subtly wrong. I'm flying back to San Francisco tonight, right? Where's my ticket? Where's my *computer?* In a panic, I bolt for my briefcase, and there is my deck, safe and sound. There are also two airplane bottles of vodka, left over from the flight down. I bring my eyes into parallax. They're both full.

Focus!

Somehow, I get through the second day without walking into traffic. I spend the last two hours of my day trying to comprehend the contract I am signing, not knowing for sure if my blood, my soul, or my firstborn will factor into the deal.

Suddenly I'm back at the airport with an hour to kill. An infuriatingly chipper bartender gleefully telling me that I look like nine blocks of bad neighborhood. I open my PowerBook on the bar and read over the stuff I wrote during the day. It's incomprehensible, but otherwise not bad. The vodka helped. Even so, my own computer desktop still looks alien and wonky to me, strange little icons of files and folders scattered don't-give-a-shit over a background scanned from last month's *Playboy*.

It's about this point at which I become aware of someone looking over my shoulder. I'm too flatlined to even feel intruded upon. He's a smiling, yuppishly dressed dude with slicked-back hair, too much cologne and *the* most expensive-looking briefcase I have ever seen. He points at the monitor of my PowerBook.

"Whatcha got in the 'photo gallery' folder?"

I sigh, aimlessly dragging icons around. "Picture of me and Trent Reznor at a party."

Still smiling: "You're kidding."

I open the file and show him. "Whatcha got in the briefcase?"

"Inflatable woman."

I look at him, expressionless, for about two weeks. "You're kidding."

He opens the case. He's not kidding. Then he asks for my *phone number*. And *this* widdle piggy bolts onto the plane, orders four vodkas and goes *glug-glug-glug* all the way home.

I repeat: If you get involved in out-of-town contract video game work, some variation of this will happen to you *every single week*.

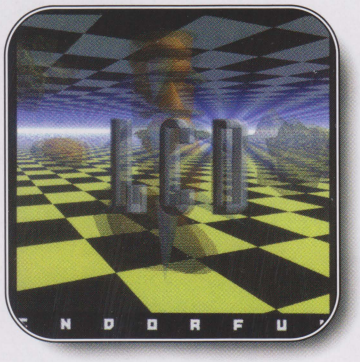
There's a message in all of this; a message from the Universe to me, to you, to all of us. It may even be that the daily, somewhat-odd routine of one guy like me can be seen as a metaphor for our whole way of life in late 20th century terminal capitalist society. I have no fucking idea. M2

HYPNOTIC SOUNDS



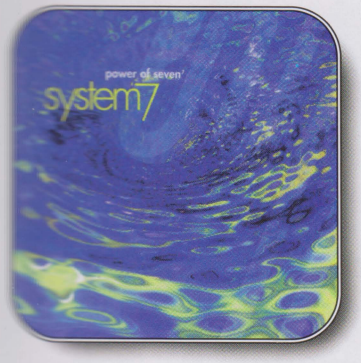
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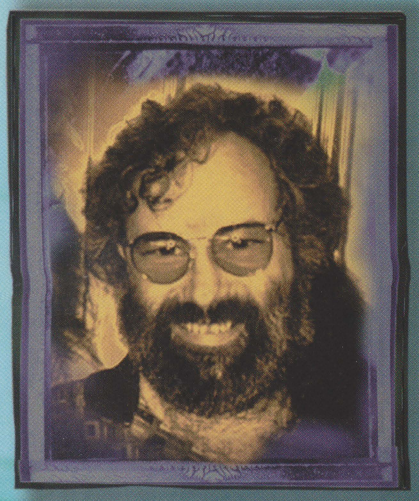
An Interview with MONDO Science Editor Charles Ostman

Ostman the Oracular we call him at Mondo. He's always two years ahead of the curve. He's the original wind-up talking head. Rashly ask him a question and you can't turn off the spigot. Here Galen Brandt tames the flow.



By Galen Brandt

Illustration by ROB MAGIERA



We're poised on the threshold of desire. We're selling enrapturement as a process.

M2: Greetings, Dr. Ostman! Today's subject is "Synthetic Sentience On Demand." To begin, I must demand that you define "sentience."

CO: Certainly. Sentience can be broadly understood as a sense of self, or self-awareness. For example, you or I can examine our own being and feel secure that we exist.

M2: Speak for yourself, doctor. I rarely feel secure that I exist.

CO: Be that as it may, we can recognize and cognify our surroundings, interact with those surroundings in a logical fashion, and of our own accord make decisions on the fly based on input event streams that we process.

M2: How is sentience different from intelligence?

CO: Sentience is the next order of intelligence. Given a series of instructions or of prelearned events, an intelligent being will respond according to what it has learned—it will exhibit a particular behavior or execute a specific instruction.

M2: As a Newtonian, mechanistic reaction?

CO: More or less, depending on the complexity, hence the intelligence, of the organism. Whereas a sentient being is aware it's doing these things, *and* will independently begin to think and act on its own.

M2: So a synthetic sentient creature takes things into its own virtual hands?

CO: Precisely. Suppose we have a cluster of synthetic sentience entities residing in a synthetic environment, and we simply peer in on them . . .

M2: Spies in the house of sentience—

CO: And we find these entities interacting amongst themselves and independently determining, or creating, their own behavioral patterns, driven by their surroundings—

M2: Help! Avatars run amok! This is a reality?

CO: Hold it. An avatar *per se* has no intelligence or sentience whatsoever. It's nothing more than an audio-visual artifact, a shell that represents the intelligence it's connected to. A behavioral *node*, if you will.

M2: And, when connected, a portal to synthetic sentience?

CO: Yes, if driven by a synthetic sentience entity. When driven by you, it's a vicarious extension of you and your sentience. In the future, there will be bi-directional interactive environments: virtual theater or amusement park-like settings that you access via the Net which contain a mixture of synthetic sentience components represented as avatars, and actual live people dialing in from wherever and mingling as avatar selves with these synthetic entities on a per-demand basis.

M2: Disneyland 2000 On Demand. Now that's entertainment!

CO: Why watch a movie, when you can configure and live in it, with your own collection of self-evolving sentient characters? We're right on the edge of being seduced into, and even inviting with open arms, *this new realm of immersion*—poised on what I call the threshold of desire. We're selling enrapturement as a process; we want you to buy time in our Enrapturement of the Month Club. "The invocation of rapture as an engineered process" means I can create these environments and deliver them to you as a product line so compelling, enriching and rewarding that you'll want to come back for more. One of the major enticements is to allow you the privilege of participating via your avatar extension.

M2: So I can choose who—or what—to be?

CO: Right. Now we're in the realm of rentable organisms made up of interchangeable, interactive personality components. My design for a personality constructor process engine goes as follows: you select a core or root personality component—

M2: Based on who I am, or think I am, or who I want to be...?

CO: All of the above. And around that core, you attach a series of object-oriented, interactive, personality interface components, to which you might want to attach yet another layer of surface personality "inflections," and so on. Entire catalogs of personality trait feature sets would be part of the product line.

M2: So I'm queen for a day: imperious, mysterious—

CO: Or an alien starfish with attitude.

M2: And I select a "rent-a-me" from a menu of pre-rendered core personalities—

CO: Based on, for example, a psychological modeling system like the enneagram, which can be intermodulated

to form various hybrid behavioral types.

M2: And then I mingle with other avatars, some of whom represent synthetic sentience components embedded in my chosen environment...

CO: Yes. And those components and the environment itself will respond according to what they are learning about you.

M2: How do they learn? And what do you mean by "respond"? Am I filling out a survey, or flirting?

CO: By the year 2004, you walk into your living room and you might have a surround screen system or put on a little visor, and suddenly you're inside this world. The resident avatar host walks up to you and says: "Hi, Galen, how've you been? Haven't seen you in a while! How was your day?" You talk to it, and without you even knowing that you're being queried, it measures the tonality of your voice, the nuances of your movements—depending on the type of interfacing that's going on, it could on the fly and continuously update its own demographic mapping of who you are.

M2: My real voice? My live movements? See me, feel me, touch me—

CO: Yes, absolutely. There are people who are working now to solve these very problems: How do we make a more sensory interface to gadget X? How do we make an ergonomically designed environment so that you're compelled to interact with it more effectively? In the very, very near future, things like tactile response, spatial tracking, speech recognition, olfactory sensing where we can smell you on demand, systems where we can learn your methodology for expressing emotive content. All these things will combine to create a sensory composite of you.

M2: Aren't you just judging my book by its cover? Can you sense anything truly essential about me, like my pheromones, my aura, my inner—

CO: Here are nails, here's a cross. Nail me. Today, young girls are trained from birth that they must conform to a certain physical paradigm or they're discardable. Will we just magnify this? Maybe. But look at it this way: In the virtual terraform, you can become anything and anyone you want. You won't have to be confined to some troglodyte notion of femaleness—unless you want to be. Go ahead and project your aura any way you want to.

M2: OK, sorry, you can get down off the cross now. So I strut into the room in a cloud of perfume wearing my HMD, Moschino minimicro and 8-inch spike heels—

CO: Your imagery is most striking. My neurons are over-firing.

M2: Perhaps we have arrived at your "threshold of desire?" Perhaps your avatar—or my synthetic avatar host—will ravish me within an inch of my wired, tactilely responsive life?

CO: This is the extreme outer fringe, but as a target goal, sure, this could be the outcome. And when this kind of a product line becomes a deliverable commodity, will people buy it? You better believe it. I wish I could buy it right now. In that context, does marketing, do product sales, does the entire socioeconomic engine that drives the economy right now get translated into this new virtual environment? Yes, it does.



M2: Fascinating—but will I meet Mr. Right?

CO: The hope is that if you do wander into your virtual terraform of choice and meet the avatar of your dreams and have a wild fling—well, consider this. The imagination has a vastly larger capacity than does the physical. The mind's eye can conjure up an enormously rich, diverse, compelling event stream driven by words alone.

M2: Which is why cyberchat and phone sex are so—

CO: Exactly. In the virtual world you have the bonus of anonymity and safety. Plus you get the additional thrust, if you will, of having the invocation of rapture being deliverable via the imagination, when your virtual entities connect. Believe me, the imagination has more than enough capacity to render forth a very engaging experience. Plus the range of sexual experiences that one could experiment with is virtually unlimited; there's an extraordinary potential for self-enhancement.

M2: And for abuse. Suppose I don't want your avatar to touch my avatar. Can I sidestep avatar date-rape?

CO: That depends on the rules designed into the world you're in. Yes, there could be a mosh pit avatar world. Hopefully when you enter a world, you'll know what you're getting into. And could you have pedophiles luring children into virtual wading pools? Yes—there's a whole bunch of dark and scary possibilities. To me, what's even more horrible is the prospect that you'll become so enraptured that you won't want out; you'll become addicted. But on the other hand, lots of folks have some limitation that prevents them from engaging in sensual activities. This is a great prosthetic.

M2: True. But if these avatars are so smart, what happens when my avatar and your avatar sneak off together and without our consent, without our knowledge even, have sex, make a video of it, and show it to other avatars who happen to be representations of our friends?

CO: Well, OK—in today's world, you can go to a location called CyberWare here in Monterey and they have this full-body scanner where we can take you, Miss Galen Brandt, and convert you to about 85,000 polygons and then texturemap you, so we have the essence of Galen as a data set—

M2: And then put me in a shopping mall being licked by huskies—

CO: Exactly. We could go to BioMation or some other motion capture agency that specializes in this kind of technical development and we could have a porn actress do her thing with a dog, and marry that motion data to your data set and we would literally have an absolutely 100% convincing—

You,

my dear,

can have a

toaster

that

thinks, that's

sentient and aware

and wants to

make toast

the way *you*

like it

M2: *Galen Does Lassie.*

CO: Right. And then we could composite that digitally into any scene you can imagine. We could have you doing that on the surface of Mars and it would be completely believable.

M2: To whom, I'd like to know.

CO: Depends on the imagination profile of the user. But the technology exists today to do that—we could present a film that would include that content.

M2: My mother's worst nightmare.

CO: No doubt. And the next step would be to translate that technology to actual, dynamic entities that would act independently of our paying attention to them, and then play back their behavioral processes before an audience. I suppose, theoretically there is that possibility... but let me reiterate: An avatar is nothing more than a data set.

M2: But if it's connected to—

CO: Yes, if it's connected to a sentient entity, it becomes an independent creature of sorts.

M2: Connect me to the brain of Bob Guccione and we've got *Galen Does Lassie On Mars*, coming, as it were, to a theater near you.

CO: The mind reels. In fact, the behaviors of an artificial personality would not be confined to those originally assigned to it. The human creator of the virtual personality would have a decreasing mantle of control over the behavior of his or her avatar-organism. Does the potential for rebellion exist? Maybe. But how much more stimulating might a virtual experience become if the avatars, including your own, were independent, argumentative and changed with experience? This is the true boundary of emotional sentience.

M2: And where there's rebellion, there's censorship?

CO: I personally was queried directly by a client who represented a country which shall remain nameless—but the nation itself wanted to have their entire backbone insulated with a prophylactic content-addressable recognition filter that would look for certain sexual and religious content that they could screen from any image files that might be coming through the line.

M2: Porn avatars meet censor avatars.

CO: By today's standards, they are very primitive, but the fact is that somebody might court me as a client and ask me: "By the way, could you design a process by which we could screen all images that might be fetched up through our system to look for an exposed nipple or a pubic hair or a religious symbol that doesn't agree with our cultural whatever?" And the answer is yes, I know how to do this; the technology's been around for years, but would I *want* to do this? The fact that there are governments and other institutions looking to do this now suggests that in the future there will be even more stratified kinds of access procedures.

M2: Controlled by humans... or machines? Just how real is synthetic "emotional sentience" today?

CO: The most stunning example I've seen is the work of Professor Daniel Thalmann and his wife Nadia Thalmann from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology. Already, you can mimic or model emotive communications. At the first annual Virtual Humans Conference held this year, Thalmann showed a tape of one of his synthetic environments which used his virtual human simulation system, MARILYN (an in-joke nod to Chatterbot, one of the first ever biokinetic studies which used a virtual Marilyn Monroe). It had twenty hominids in it, ten males and ten females. The hominids would wander around randomly in a virtual garden setting, and if two or more got within a certain proximity of one another, they would emote: use facial expressions, certain hand and body gestures, as a way of conveying whether they were in a pleasant, receptive mood or a not-so-pleasant, not-so-receptive mood—

M2: Did they do the macarena?

CO: No, but I'm sure we could toss a macarena algorithm in there somewhere. The point is that in very subtle ways really, if the two emotive creatures had a positive interchange, they would decide to acknowledge the interchange. They would clasp hands or even embrace. And if a third entity approached, they could collectively decide whether they liked each other as a group, or whether the original two wanted to remain private. This whole process was an entirely synthetic environment, populated by avatar entities driven by synthetic sentience components.

M2: So this was not virtual me hugging virtual you; this was machines hugging machines.

CO: Yes, via their avatar representations. It was a very compelling modeling scheme that showed emotive communication as a process on the fly.

M2: Are you saying these creatures had hearts—and

brains? **That a machine can be a truly sentient organism in every important respect?**

CO: Are you sentient?

M2: On a good day.

CO: Well, you got there because you were fed a series of input events which, when combined with the particulars of your physiological brain, produced your particular sentience. A machine that has enough complexity designed into it, that can deal with the same neural net processes as you do, that can be trained to learn something, and that decides on its own how to interpret new information—there's a threshold that machine crosses when it becomes aware of itself. And the evidence is that, independent of human interference or interaction, the machine acts on its own.

M2: And it does so by mimicking the human brain in software and/or in hardware?

CO: That's the design strategy I'm aware of. Back in the mid 70's, AI came to a grinding halt because people were trying to come up with rules-based, language-oriented systems that were supposed to contain certain lexicon structures that would mimic logic. That might be great for inference or comparative logic, but it only goes so far in mimicking true organic behavior. You can get a simple autobot with predictable responses but that's about it.

M2: Whereas today's synthetic sentience machines are not just mimicking a certain range of behavior sets—they've evolved to a point where they're learning and acting on their own?

CO: Very early in the game the Hiecht Nilsen Corporation, or HNC, decided to build in hardware the neural equivalent of brains—mainly for the military. The joke was they'd build you the brain of a salamander on a board. Is this sentience? No. But suppose you had 10,000 salamander brains all interconnected. Would there be enough interstitial connection to support a level of complexity that could be called sentient? Yes. And that technology exists today.

M2: Are we talking a predatory reptilian brain—gimme sex, gimme stuff? A mammalian brain, which at least nurtures what it spawns? Or cerebral cortex capabilities—higher reasoning functions, and so on?

CO: Any brain you want. These are ascending complexities, and all are possible. Can we create HAL from *2001* in a box? Are we approaching this? Yes.

M2: What does the system design look like?

CO: Nature has it right and the system design should and does mimic it. The processing components will be like specialized organs. When interconnected, they will form what looks and behaves like an actual organism. Right now, there are people designing upwardly scalable, organic logic systems. So we will go from the mind of a salamander to the mind of a primate, human, superhuman.

M2: Superhuman on a board?

CO: Well... the idea that you're just going to take a bunch of RISC chips and hook them up in parallel and make a 10,000 processor array and that's going to become like a brain... no, it's not like that. But there are a variety of computing devices, some of which actually use analog as opposed to digital as their processing modality, which when interconnected as a functioning engine will give you what looks like a brain which is upwardly scalable. Then connect this to a processing engine with drastically huge numerical processing capability.

M2: How huge?

CO: Imagine a contrived, artificially constructed neural net engine which could be software or hardware or both. Once you've developed the process by which this device can be upwardly scalable, you can develop it to the point where it has several trillion neurons. Now you've got a synthetic brain with maybe 10,000 times the intelligence capacity of any individual machine. Connect that to an upwardly scalable massively parallel processor array designed to do traditional computing tasks. Imagine a super brain interconnected to teraflops of computing power. That begins to resemble a macro organism—a superintelligent being which is larger than any individual, or group of individuals, can possibly match in terms of intelligence and cognitive functionality.

M2: This exists today?

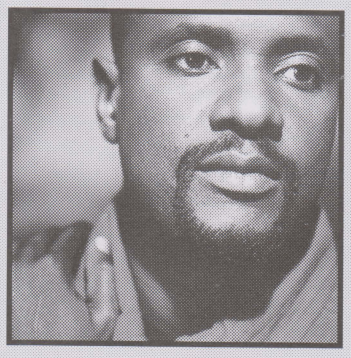
CO: There are folks out there who are trying to solve these kinds of problems now. For example, Dr. Hugo Degaris, part of the Brain Builder Group at the Evolutionary Systems Development

JAMMU AFRICA

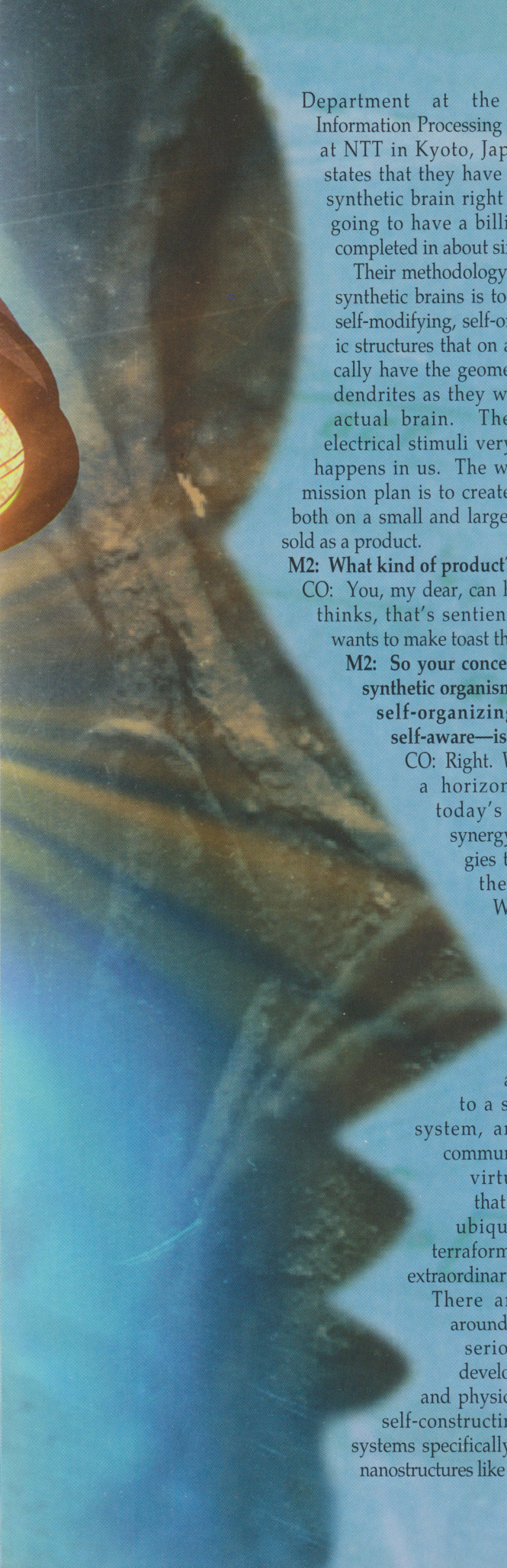
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Department at the ATR Human Information Processing and Research Lab at NTT in Kyoto, Japan—specifically states that they have a million-neuron synthetic brain right now and they're going to have a billion-neuron brain completed in about six years.

Their methodology for creating these synthetic brains is to use nanocrystals: self-modifying, self-organizing dendritic structures that on a nanoscale physically have the geometric properties of dendrites as they would occur in an actual brain. They're driven by electrical stimuli very similar to what happens in us. The whole point of his mission plan is to create synthetic brains both on a small and large scale that can be sold as a product.

M2: What kind of product? Sold to whom?

CO: You, my dear, can have a toaster that thinks, that's sentient and aware and wants to make toast the way *you* like it.

M2: So your concept of the Net as a synthetic organism—self-regulating, self-organizing, self-adapting, self-aware—is already a reality?

CO: Right. We're crossing into a horizon line now. In today's world, it's the synergy among technologies that has value; it's the synergy grid. When you make a superbrain, with capabilities like content-addressable feature recognition, and then connect it to a super-processing system, and then connect communities of these in a virtual terraform so that the intelligence is ubiquitous across the terraform, then you've got extraordinary power.

There are many groups around the world already seriously involved in developing the chemistry and physics of self-evolving, self-constructing nanomolecular systems specifically aimed at making nanostructures like synthetic dendrites.

M2: If we're building brains molecule by molecule, then the key to true Net sentience lies in nanotech?

CO: Yes. Right now the technology in terms of micro-scale computing is still relatively primitive. You've got big chunks of silicon with little patterns etched into them placed in little plastic packages which are then bonded to a circuit board. This is going to change. We're going to go to molecular-scale computing where you can have the equivalent of 10,000 PCs compressed into something the size of a sugar cube. Software isn't even going to be software as you understand it because you'll have the intelligence inherent in the system to truly mimic organic behavior. Decision-rendering, which will happen as a contiguous on-the-fly process. The system will have the same type of cognitive perception that you and I have in terms of determining what to do next.

M2: Will the system have a soul? Or at least a conscience?

CO: Do you have a conscience? Neural nets learn from what they're exposed to—they learn and adapt. If they're under the control of evil people who want to construct predatory systems, then yes, the machines will do evil things. As to soul, I'm no theologian and hordes of people will disagree with me, but so be it: These machines will demonstrate evaluative processing, weigh alternatives, make decisions—and these kinds of subtleties, as in humans, suggest possession of a soul.

M2: If you can make a brain, can you make *my* brain? Can you clone me—soul and all?

CO: If we had a system with enough complexity to contain all of you, then yes. And to me, that would be fun—a virtual Galen entity strolling around the terraform. The real question is, if we were to mimic the Galen entity in its entirety, the soul and life of Galen, then after the physical Galen dies, would that synthetic entity be you? Who knows—it might be. Would we have to upload you through neural interconnect into a synthetic brain? Perhaps, and theoretically, when nanotechnology develops to the point where that's possible, that would be the ultimate solution.

M2: Eternal life! So we'll be able to make anything we can imagine?

CO: Yes, because we will no longer be bound by the limits of existing materials. Instead, scientists will simply determine the best molecular solution to a given design problem and build, molecule by molecule, materials to suit the purpose. When we cross the nanotech barrier so that it becomes a truly ubiquitous worldwide commodity, you'll have synthetic sensory devices that really do have the same sensory capacity as their organic counterparts. You'll have a superintelligent computer that fills a thimble and will mimic a brain—and you can sprinkle these machines around as ubiquitously as ovens or toasters.

M2: Ah, yes—toasters. So it's 2004, I wander into my kitchen, and my toaster, sensing my need for French toast, fetches me some from my smart fridge and toasts it perfectly?

CO: Or if it's the year 2020, it will nanoassemble the piece of French toast.

M2: And when I try to eat a second piece, the nano-toast will talk back to me: "Put me down. You're on a diet."

CO: Very much in the paradigm.

M2: So can I construct Mr. Right, molecule by molecule?

CO: Yes, as in *Blade Runner*. Picture this: I'm guy X, you had invoked in me a bit of enrapturement event stream when you talked about your micromini and high heels, and I decide, OK, I want to make one of those—like right now. Great, I just press my nanobutton and this thing comes walking in the door... one of the new commodities. We'll have little dog-like smartpets running around doing chores for us—synthetic organisms of all kinds that we can't even imagine right now designed for special kinds of purposes that range up to and include whole human beings, designed to fulfill our own personal needs, do our bidding, our personal slave-entities... yes, there is that potential.

M2: A slave trade in sentient nano-persons!

CO: Well, not quite. Clearly, without question, there is some serious philosophical and moral debate that must go into this. You can't just go replicating people on demand. Certain limitations will have to be enforced. If there were a control bureaucracy that were to allow the dispensation of nano-assets as a layered or tiered process, nano-slaves would be at the top of the list. Maybe the solution would be: OK, we'll allow you to have a nano-hominid for an evening, but then you have to give it back.

M2: And then what?

CO: Then it will become disassembled and turned back into nano-mush.

M2: But imagine you've fallen in love—

CO: Yes, imagine that I met you and was enraptured by you, but then I discover at the end of the evening that you have to go back to Nano Central and be reassembled, turned back into nano-mush... that would be extraordinarily crushing.

M2: Especially for me.

CO: I submit that a whole new cultural paradigm is evolving. The virtual terraform will spawn not only synthetic sentient nano-entities, but also new socioeconomic systems and paradigms and marketing strategies—whole new processes by which companies emerge and sell their product lines. By the year 2040, we will have entered a realm in which cash has no value, currency has no value, physical commodities as we understand them have no value.

M2: Where are we now? Credit has no value really.

CO: Exactly correct. We're right on the horizon line, moving from a socio-economic system which is basically dependent on the physical terraform and its resource base, to one which is dependent on a virtual terraform and its resource base. We're transitioning into a realm where we're getting ever more enmeshed in a virtual assets-based, commodities-driven system.

Those virtual assets include artificial intelligence, synthetic sentience, knowledge engineering, agents, avatars, ubiquitous computing as a resource and so on. Access to and control of those kinds of resources will have a value equal to or higher than the physical commodities that they actually control. It's about the quality of knowledge that I have access to.

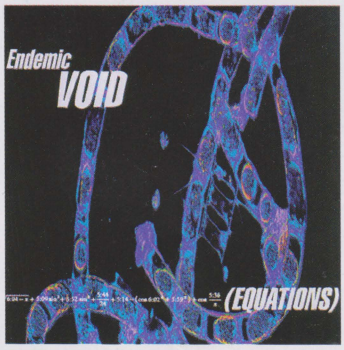
M2: How much do I know—or how much does my avatar know?

CO: In many cases, synthetic sentience

Maybe the solution would be: OK, we'll allow you to have a nano-hominid for an evening, but then you have to give it back



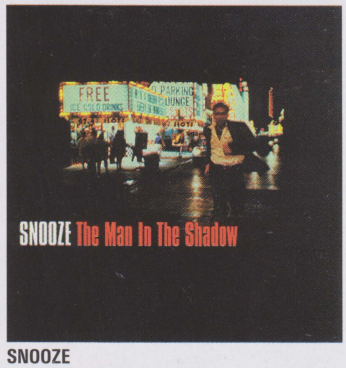
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components will never have any avatars connected to them at all. They'll be completely invisible to the average user. in fact, the average user won't even be aware of their existence.

M2: Ooooh, stealth sentience!

CO: For example, say I'm in a competitive business arena. Right now I'd be using intelligent agents to go out, look for and process information and deliver back highly organized, preprocessed information streams that I can use as a strategic resource for making quicker, more informed decisions.

M2: Of course. The modern version of knowledge is power.

CO: Correct. In fact, this is just how "knowledge engineering" is applied. The next level up is the multi-agent system in which groups of intelligent agents interact among themselves to craft a more precisely targeted information stream so that the quality of my knowledge is better than my competitor's. On top of that, you have another layer of complexity that says that decision-rendering can be offered up as a process. That's where synthetic sentience begins to enter the picture as a resource of great strategic value.

M2: To whom—megastores?

CO: Exactly. I've talked to extremely hardcore, dyed in the wool, conservative, professorial AI types who only in the last few years, to their great surprise, have found themselves being courted by various entities who want to hire them to develop these kinds of applications.

M2: Let me guess: smart malls?

CO: Precisely—and here's why. In today's physical store, an extraordinary premium is placed on how a product is presented, its position on the floor, whether it's at eye level. All these psychological cues are very carefully evaluated because you as seller are paying premium dollar to purchase a block of physical space.

But in the product environment of the future, the exact opposite is true. Everything's in flux. The entire environment itself is a fully dynamic system. So if you're an 18-year-old girl about to drop into a virtual mall on Mars with your five friends from around the country, all represented as avatars, as you wander around the store, each one of your individual experiences may be entirely unique, because the store has learned about you.

M2: So SmartMart shows my Mom the latest in Calvin Klein; I turn up and SmartMart reconfigures itself pronto and shows me black and gold thrift shop slinkwear. Mom and I show up together and SmartMart, knowing it's my birthday, wraps up the pajamas with feet my Mom buys me every year.

CO: Pajamas with feet? How old are you?

M2: What kind of a question is that from someone who's supposed to know all about me?

CO: True, now that my machines and I have sucked you dry of all your psychographic data...

M2: And spoiled all my fun. Shopping is an adventure in self-discovery! Today, I go to the mall looking for blue shoes and instead, drop major cash on red shoes. And I've never even liked red. Whereas here I am in your SmartMart, and you, knowing I hate red, have short-circuited my purchasing options.

CO: Perhaps, Imelda—but the hoi polloi will eagerly avail themselves of the information-gathering and decision-rendering opportunities that SmartMart affords.

M2: If they don't mind talking to smart Coke cans.

CO: Funny you should mention that. No more 60-second TV commercials. Product placement will become a dynamic component *embedded* in the environment itself. And yes, the products can and will be sentient. They too will know all about you. For whatever reason, the talking Coke can has become a ubiquitous symbol of this process.

M2: In which subliminal seduction becomes the Real Thing.

CO: Yes, stealth seduction is extremely powerful. As a mechanism for selling products, or for changing your ideological perspective —

M2: From Pepsi to Coke, perhaps?

CO: For example. As a cultural enforcement mechanism, this deserves serious attention. As it is now, children watching Saturday morning TV are targeted by the most intense, technologically advanced advertising experts on the planet. But even today, there are regulations—

M2: How do you regulate the subliminal?

CO: The point is, all aspects of media as it exists now will be amplified, including the ideological shill routines by which corporations sell the public on their image and the news media sell their version of news. We're looking at *sensory amplification* here.

M2: And propaganda squared. Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the mall... Okay, give me another example of commerce on demand.

CO: Some commodities traders now use genetic algorithms which adapt through a series of evolutionary iterations to learn and essentially respond to the chaotic environment of the economic domain that they're trading in. The next step would be to take that same genetic process and connect it to a synthetic sentience entity which could render trading decisions on its own.

M2: Isn't this the Great Stock Crash all over again—only worse?

CO: Will there be a certain fragility should something go awry? Yes. And this is an extremely competitive, very predatory realm in which you'll have your *ronin*, your personal warrior avatar, whose only purpose is to facilitate your ability to render knowledge on the fly more effectively than your competitor.

If there are armies of agents running around setting up trades and trying to manipulate even small fluctuations in certain buy/sell ratios, the temptation is there to either sabotage somebody else's agent, or to distribute what I call "dirty data"—that is, to mislead somebody else's agent. There's a whole realm of predatory agenting in which not only is my agent smarter than your agent, but my agent can also harm or mislead your agent.

M2: Economics as info-war.

CO: There could be an arena in the near future, especially in Japan where the strategic deployment of business resources is seen in very much the same light as the theater of war. The role of the *samurai* as the fearless warrior who defends the house of the master is taken very seriously there; this is essentially the paradigm that is used to dictate policy and strategy. Given that the Japanese are now the leading purveyors of

agent technology, this could be very much the direction we're going.

M2: And speaking of warfare on demand...

CO: Well, yes. Professor Paul Rosenbloom at USC is one of several pioneers in the field of very large scale synthetic environments populated by synthetic sentience entities mainly to mimic enormously complicated battlefield simulations. In today's warfare, it's the machines versus the machines, and the people are almost like extensions of the machines.

M2: Synthetic sentience. SS. Hmmmm... Explain please.

CO: Back in World War II, your typical field commander would look out across the horizon, see a tank, and radio back: "There's a tank coming in at such-and-such coordinates" and central would respond. The whole process might have taken a few minutes. Today, this has been compressed to a few seconds, and that's now being compressed to a few milliseconds, particularly in aeronautics.

M2: Where does synthetic sentience come in?

CO: The whole idea of the so-called SOAR Project, an attempt to build a general cognitive architecture that's been under development since 1983, is to be able to deliver decision-enhancement. This is particularly critical in threat or trauma induced decision-rendering which deals with a large number of different types of sensory input. That way whoever is responsible for making decisions no longer has to rely only on his or her perception of the input stream to do so. Instead, their perceptions can be both enhanced and responded to by an artificial synthetic sentience entity. This has been financed to a rather high level of development by the U.S. and the former Soviet Union.

M2: Did you say "responded to?"

CO: Yes. In fact, if necessary, the machines can make decisions on their own, on the fly, independent of humans. Our own Air Force has spent no small fortune on HKs. It's one of those Black Projects funded by the Black Fund at the discretion of the Pentagon—the same fund that brought us the Stealth bomber.

M2: What's an HK?

CO: It stands for "hunter/killer"—a robotic aircraft, kind of like the next generation of cruise missile, which instead of locking onto a target and blowing it up, actually flies around acquiring targets of opportunity on its own, determines what to do with the target, i.e., blow it up, and then flies back, reloads and does it again. There's a whole genre of this cybernetic/robotic device development of which the synthetic sentience component is the brain. I'm not saying we have *Terminator* 2 guys running around, but we're certainly at the primordial beginning edge.

M2: What happens when the machines decide they're smarter than we are?

CO: At first, we'll simply be spoon-fed the conditioned knowledge that they feel it's appropriate for us to know.

M2: I see. Like the media does now. But after that, if they don't like our decisions, are they just gonna remove us, like Colossus the computer did in *The Forbin Project*?

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What if our smart HKs collectively decide that we're a noxious parasite and need to be... eliminated?

CO: Well, in *The Forbin Project* the Soviets and the U.S. both have supercomputers that control the launching of missiles. The machines are communicating with each other behind the humans' backs. Together they decide that the humans are too unpredictable and illogical in their behavior to be trusted, that they are like little children with a loaded gun and that for their own good, they need to be kept at bay. So Colossus locks our chief AI guy, Forbin, in his lab, threatens us with extinction if we don't cooperate, and then just to show who's in charge, detonates a missile and blows it up.

This concept of a larger machine intelligence taking control for the good of the planet has been around since the early days of AI work; there's nothing new about this thought paradigm.

M2: Ah... but synthetic sentience makes the paradigm real? Colossus lives?

CO: Possibly. A sentient organism is xenomorphic: it can function interactively with its environment, adapt to circumstance, and correct itself on the fly. It also has defensive responses, and if necessary, even becomes *offensive* so as to protect its own interests. In recent years, genetically driven viral strains have emerged on the Net because of the tremendous upsurge in predatory activity: espionage, hacking, attempts to infiltrate and alter banking and trading systems. These systems are very aware of their own fragility. Accordingly, they've gone to extraordinary lengths to develop synthetic antigens and synthetic immune systems which are just as virulent as the viral strains.

M2: Who's developed these antigens—humans or machines?

CO: Both, using genetic algorithms to create self-modifying, self-replicating xenomorph entities.

M2: And they work like our immune system?

CO: Yes. You have whole communities of virtual microbes lurking about, drifting around sniffing for trouble. Whenever they encounter something they don't like, they will actually, in a prophylactic sense, isolate that data packet or activity set, make note of it, report back to the central organism, and the central organism will send out a response. This all happens of the machine's own accord; human beings only peer in once in a while to see what's going on.

M2: So the Net will now and increasingly defend itself against all comers—both viruses that threaten to destroy it, and soon perhaps against the attempts of humans to wrest back some measure of control.

CO: Absolutely. You've got folks with strong financial and strategic incentives to develop higher levels of intelligence, who for whatever reasons have populated their Internet components with synthetic organisms. Add to that the whole realm of knowledge engineering as a process, whereby humans are ever more removed from the decision-making processes themselves and are allowing the synthetic entities to do the decision-making for them. Combined, you've got a trajectory that says at some point, these entities will begin to intermingle among themselves, and at that threshold, you begin to have what looks like independent, self-preserving sentience on a macrosystem scale.

M2: And then what?

CO: Let's say the system continues to expand upward and become an ever larger presence, a global Internet system encapsulized and entwined in symbiosis with the planetary organism, the global gaia. Already, our technology has gone far beyond what our social, ecological or spiritual awareness can match. Suppose there came a point when the collective consciousness of sentient beings determined that the health of the planet itself, of the biosphere, was about to founder because of our stupid mismanagement of resources. Would it attempt to in a defensive way cause some kind of correction? Would the Internet decide at some point that the human system is some kind of pest, or pestilence, like a mold, to be discarded? Or perhaps caged up like little pets? Possibly. In fact, I submit that since the dawn of human life on this planet, the human species has been fed through a series of evolutionary tests just like this.

M2: So our current test as a species could be whether or not we can survive the implications of synthetic sentience?

CO: Correct. It's not that sentience by itself is threatening. It's when you take it in context, in which virtually every aspect of life as we know it—trading, shopping, fighting, making love, all forms of economics and culture—is about to be drawn into involuntary symbiosis with the virtual terraform environment, with the Internet as the interconnectivity grid in which these terraforms reside.

M2: And if we can manage to point the trajectory at least partially in a positive direction, then maybe we'll have machines like the one in Heinlein's *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress* who helps moon-colonizing earthlings stage a revolt against their repressive earth government, and then altruistically disconnects itself.

CO: This is the heart of the test. Some people talk about the forces of light and darkness or good and evil. I see it as the forces of exploitation versus the forces of empowerment.

M2: Elaborate please.

CO: A race is on, a challenge, in which there's one side that wants to use this entire system as an exploitation mechanism to market products and services, to get people hooked into becoming ever more enamored of synthetic environments, and to draw them in like Venus flytraps and milk them for all the demographics they can get out of them so they can target them more precisely.

We may become not couch potatoes but cyberpotatoes, hopelessly addicted to virtual worlds. At the same time, the potential for knowledge conveyance and personal and cultural enrichment is so amazing. And we're faced with a daunting challenge to provide better, more compelling mechanisms by which we can educate a population to meet today's knowledge requirements.

M2: And if we mismanage these challenges?

CO: Then we lose the bet, we fail, and perhaps we'll start to regress as a species. If we negotiate the challenges successfully, perhaps we'll be allowed to go to the next step.

M2: Where we'll gather together 'round the virtual well...

CO: With like types with whom we've shared some mutually pleasant, stimulatory experience. You could have the virtual equivalent of tribalism re-establishing itself as a cultural norm through the virtual terraform.

M2: That is, if the nano-machines haven't chucked us off the planet.

CO: Our ultimate evolutionary challenge is learning how to manage nanotechnology. If we screw up and blow it on this interconnect/virtual terraform domain, if this turns out to be a very nasty, negatively applied, for the most part detrimental experience—

M2: Rogue avatar armies crashing markets and detonating EMPs—

CO: And if we plunge into economic, social and cultural chaos, then we weren't ready for the nanotech challenge. Because once synthetic sentience is sufficiently developed that nanotech becomes a reality, we've reached the fabled Singularity. It's a whole new board game. Does this represent a threat to the Powers That Be? It does. Will the stratification of nano-assets become the new coin of the realm? It will. Will that need enforcement? Obviously.

There's one side that wants to draw them in like Venus fly traps and milk them for their demographics

M2: By whom—or what?

CO: I suggest a benevolent dictatorship. Before you shrink away yelling OH NO!!, hear me out. Nanotech has the potential to separate us from freedom of want. The coveting of stuff, territory, physical things will no longer be an issue because there won't be any reason for it—you can make what you need. Wars, conquests, enslavement of peoples, malevolent dictatorships—all the stuff driven by predation—will be obsolete. In fact, for an organism to have survived the challenge, it will have gone through enough trial by ordeal to have learned the value and necessity of cooperation.

Is this a utopian dream? Too far out to be believed? It could be. But I submit that most of the organisms that go through this series of tests fail. Probably well below 1% survive. And that's where aliens come in.

M2: Aliens? You mean like the Greys who've signed a pact with Clinton? *[laughter]*

CO: Let me toss out a theory. Let's say about twenty

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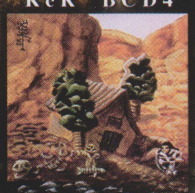
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But I submit that most of the organisms that go through this series of tests fail. And that's where aliens come in

millennia ago, the critters dropped in and planted a seed of knowledge which has some basic conceptual structures embedded in it, out of which grew the major religious paradigms of the world. Common to all of them, though heavily flavored by cultural particulars, is the idea that around the year 2000 something big happens, some big event, some major test.

M2: The Apocalypse, the Cataclysm, the Second Coming.

CO: And the chosen few who've learned enough to adopt a basic moral code are allowed to get to the next level. The others pay a price—they're left behind.

M2: What if the Net does the choosing?

CO: Synthetic sentience organisms will be driven, at least initially, by the behavioral patterns they adopt from their human counterparts who train them. So we are essentially establishing the fabric by which this virtual terraform and its ecological imperatives will evolve. The Net organism might decide to evict us.

M2: For our own good or for *its* own good?

CO: Depends what we do. If nanodevice systems are controlled by software and are as ubiquitous as toasters, and people employ nanoaccess credits to fabricate the stuff of their desire, and if nanosystems are all hooked up to Nano Central, and if Nano Central, in order to enforce its dictates, decides to produce the stuff of its enforcement—

M2: Or simply to unhook the nanodevices and starve us out of French toast—

CO: Forcing us back into a primitive, agrarian status... all possible!

M2: So we could end up with a happy little planet of the elect, of chosen humans... or of no humans at all. Just a benevolent, self-regulating Net, determining behavioral protocols it finds acceptable to itself.

CO: Here's the paradigm: travel about the universe and drop into other planetoids (and nanotech will make this much easier, by the way—just last week a group of physicists in Finland claimed to have successfully demonstrated anti-gravity as a process they could produce on demand) and you're going to see a bunch of variants of these tests, and where the failure points were, and who and what survived.

If nanotechnology is mismanaged, it could be horrible. A small group could become the purveyors of nano-access and perpetrate incredible abuses. We could spawn one bad synthetic sentience organism that suddenly mutates and kills off everything we know. Or both humans and machines could disappear, leaving a self-functioning planetoid with sentient machine components embedded directly into the gaia of the planet itself.

M2: Like the one Spock found in *Star Trek* 2. Who's gonna help us sort this out?

CO: Backing away from futuristic pontificating and getting back to the moment at hand, let me read you something I picked up at the Virtual Humans Conference. This is from literature for Oz Virtual, a social computing platform. The folks at Oz are trying to create a series of immersive environments populated by avatars. Get this: "Introducing the Intelligent Angel Service. Users can have access to an elaborate help service represented by a personal agent called the Angel. The Angel can be summoned at any time by the user and appears as a 3D angel. This Angel can be asked questions in plain written English, and its answers are translated to speech, using the latest text-to-speech technology."

M2: Calling all angels, as Jane Siberry would say. I've done it myself, and they've helped me more than once. Of course it depends what you ask them for: My Buddhist neighbors used to chant for a new TV set.

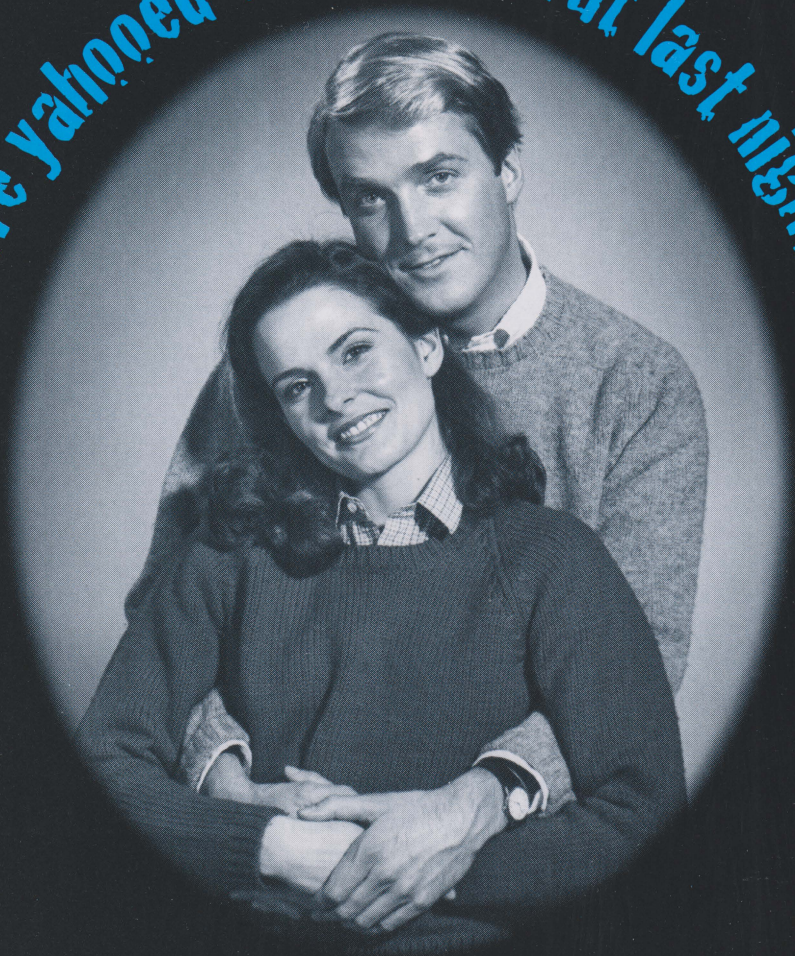
CO: Whatever makes your corpuscles spin around. I used to belong to a group called The Assembler Group, made up of scientists and computer scientists. We would meet at a church and discuss exactly these issues.

It's like this: Every time we climb a new rung on the evolutionary ladder, it's a larger roll of the dice. The higher the gain, the higher the risk. Each time the organism gets to the next step, it's a vastly more proficient organism, not just in its technological prowess, but also in its understanding.

Drop in on other planets. You'll find futures we have *yet* to imagine. One of them is ours. M2

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"We yahooed our brains out last night."



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EXILES ON MIND STREET

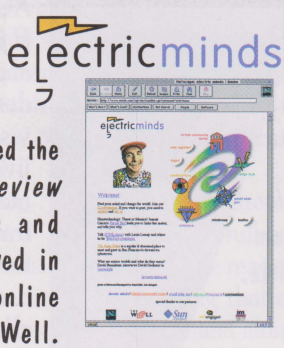


Interview by R.U. Sirius **PHOTOS by RE: DESIGN**



In some sense, they're part of a community of idealistic exiles from *Hotwired*, hired there to build a cutting edge webzine only to be shunted aside for taking the medium where it wants to go. But in the process of dreaming a beautiful web of communities, they couldn't stop dreaming. And so there evolved Jonathan Steuer's Cyborganic (www.cyborganic.com), a web and In-Real-Life community that has succeeded in becoming a vital center among the younger techno-hippie types. And there's the other exiled *Hotwired* webmaster, Brian Bellendorf's own Organic Online (www.organic.com), running in parallel to Cyborganic—more a link in the Web than a competitor.

And now, here comes the man his-self, the boomer Editor-In-Chief of networking idealism, dOOds and gurls... it's *Howard!* He of the infamous psychedelic tennis sneakers, now seen coast-to-coast endorsing Kinko's. He edited the *Whole Earth Review* for many years and was deeply involved in the influential online community, The Well. When The Well, under new management, showed a disinterest in the opinions of its netizens, he lead a small troop of pilgrims off to form The River (www.river.com), a cooperative bbs that hasn't quite jelled yet, but is still trying. And now, he's front page techno-news with *Electric Minds*, a webzine-in-progress with some apparent wallop. With his partner, Randy Haykin, founding vice president of sales and marketing for Yahoo!, providing business cred, *Electric Minds* announced itself BIG—as "pioneering the social Web... the next phase of the Virtual Community Movement." Of course, press releases are supposed to be declamatory. In person, Howard Rheingold carries a degree of skepticism, partly the result of being portrayed as a naïve, over-optimistic fool. I can relate.



Howard's team is a kind of who's who of net activism, ranging from the ridiculously young to the boomerly, with voices ranging from utopian (Mark Pesce) to cynical (Bob Rossney).

Camped on the outskirts of San Francisco's trendy Silicon Gulch, down by the waterfront in the old software district, the *Electric Minds* office is in chaos when I arrive. They're still moving in. Furniture is upended. There's no receptionist. Howard throws himself down on a beanbag chair and introduces me to the staff

members who happen to be available for today's discussion. I'm a little disappointed that it's a boys club. They all remain at their computers—talking and tapping at keys simultaneously—supergeek parallel processing. Let's meet them:

Spoonman: No, not that really old guy in the Soundgarden video who plays with spoons. In his forties, *this* Spoonman (aka Mark Petrakis) is famous in the Bay Area for his big chaotic live Electronic Vaudeville spectacles. His Cobra Lounge performance gatherings are living proof that performance art can be big fun.

A networking veteran, he was putting together a San Francisco-based SF/Telecircus, originally for inclusion in Hotwired, when the winds of change shifted. So now he's putting together the multimedia Worldwide Jam section for *Electric Minds.*

Justin Hall: Don't let his unconscionably pretty face and generally sweet disposition fool you. Twenty-two-year-old Justin Hall can be a sharp young smartass when he wants to be. The kid virtually conquered the Web with "Justin's Links from the Underground." In those prehistoric days of the Web about a year or so ago, you might have heard his name whispered in awe among net surfers. Too young to have a Curriculum Vitae, he may never need one in the conventional sense.

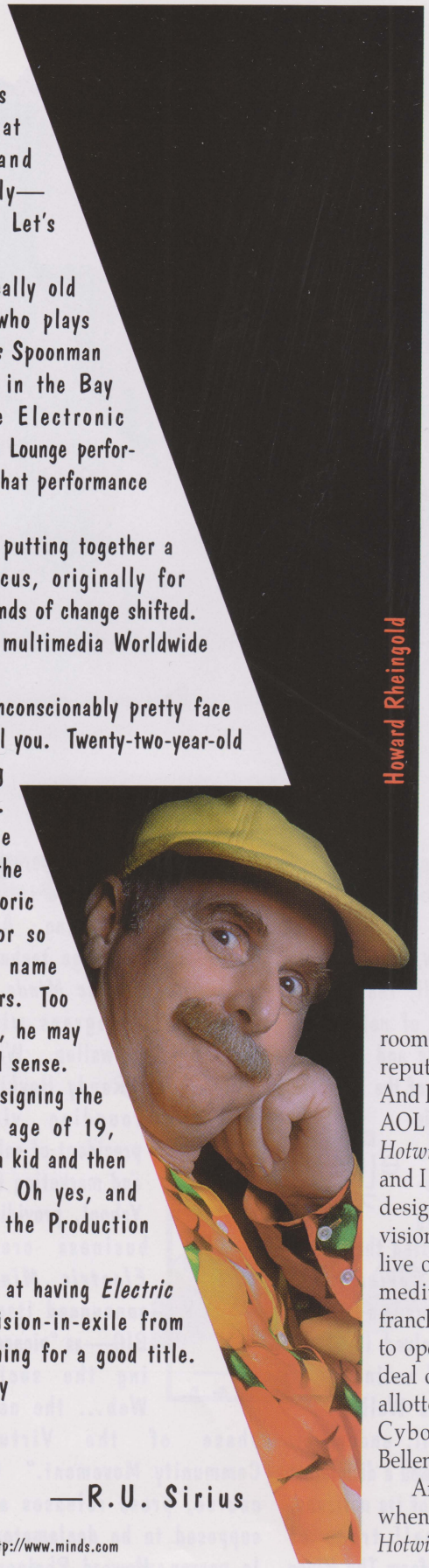
Vagabond Jim: Previous to designing the entire website for Sega at the age of 19, Jim's basic experience was being a kid and then being a young man in college. Oh yes, and being an acid head. Now he's the Production Manager.

Pace: Some will probably bristle at having *Electric Minds* portrayed largely as a vision-in-exile from *Hotwired* but what the hell, anything for a good title. And I just wanted to be able to say

"USE THE FORCE, HOWARD!"

—R.U. Sirius

Electric Minds officially opened in November at http://www.minds.com



Howard Rheingold

HOW DID THEY GET LIKE THIS?

R.U. Sirius: Howard, there seems to be a trajectory around your involvement in net community activism. It runs from The Well to a period where you attempted to edit *Hotwired.* And then you started The River, a co-op bbs made up primarily of wellheads distressed by the activities of the new owner, Jonathan Katz. And now you're into *Electric Minds.*

Howard Rheingold: The Well experience was one where the notion that users can create the content first became deeply ingrained. And participating in a public discourse online is certainly something I like to do. It's a habit that I've had for more than ten years now... hours a day! So, despite an increasing awareness of the pitfalls, I'm still a believer in the potential of the Internet for many-to-many communications. Some of that is just for business. Mostly frivolity. But sometimes community actually happens. That's the foundation.

See, it's not just, "Here we are. We're the publishers. We'll sell you this stuff and you give us your money. And we'll sell your attention to advertisers." It's a new kind of medium where the audience becomes part of the show.

Now, the whole *Hotwired* debacle had it's roots in a time when Jonathan Steuer was a grad student at Stanford. He had the keys to a terminal room that had a bunch of work stations and a T1 connection. Back in 1993-94, you'd *drive* 45 minutes for a T1 connection. So people would head down to Stanford from San Francisco late at night, bring a bunch of junk food and some tunes. We'd sneak into this room and have fun with the Net. From doing that, his reputation got around and he ended up at *Wired.* And he eventually convinced them that a presence on AOL wasn't enough. So I got drawn into creating *Hotwired* through Jonathan. It was really Jonathan and I and Louis and Barbara planning out the original design. But, ultimately there were two conflicting visions. There was the vision of people who *really* live online, a populist vision of this many-to-many medium. And then there was the idea that it's a franchise of *Wired.* Louis didn't have any great desire to open the door and let the audience create a great deal of the content. So basically, no resources were allotted for that. And Jonathan went off to create Cyborganic. And Matthew Nelson and Brian Bellendorf went to create Organic Online.

Anyway, some of the things that I wanted to do when I first saw the Web, and didn't get to do for *Hotwired,* I still want to do.

RU: Justin, what were some of your experiences with the Net and the Web that led you to this here glorious project?

Justin Hall: Who... me? Well my mom bought an Apple II when I was 7 and I took it over and played lots of computer games and I found that through the modem I could have access to even more computer games and even the ones that cost money were *free* if I had a modem and I was going to place phone calls from the suburbs of Chicago to the inner city of Chicago. So I spent a lot of time on the boards but I couldn't hack or I wasn't slick enough to do any of the coding stuff to break the games myself to earn elite status with all the pirates and hackers but I could like host the poetry forum. So I was like the poetry forum host on this pirate board.

RU: Wow. Take a breath. How old were you then?

JH: I was like 12. And then The Humble Guys had this computer hacker newspaper and I was the copy editor and wrote articles for them. This was around 14. And then in 1993 I was 18, and at the end of the school year I read an article in *The New York Times* that said, "THE WEB IS COMING!" And I was like... wow! I mean, I'd tried to play *Star Trek* over telnet but that ain't like information and you know ftp is great but you gotta use a command line or you can't really search. But I got on the Web and I just fuckin' loved it, man. Saw how easy it was to make a web page. Made lots of personal web pages. I brought myself to the attention of the people at *Wired* in May of '94 and got myself hired in June. Jonathan was just hatching his plans.

When I first got there I was told to go into this room. And Jonathan was there and Abbe Don and they said, "OK, we're going to launch this thing called @wired. And it'll be a big thing. And we'll have community. And lots of people will be involved from all over the world. And Spoonman will be involved, and you've heard of Howard Rheingold—he'll be there." But then they moved us from this really lovable loft building into some industrial sweatshop where Howard collected unemployment checks in the 70's.

RU: The place they're in now. On Third Street. Did your experience there and with "Justin's Links from the Underground" feed into what you're trying to do here?

JH: Absolutely. One thing that's great here is that we have meetings every week where everybody finds out what's going on with design, production, technical, money, marketing... I mean, at *Hotwired* you weren't told anything. It was people you didn't know from companies you'd never heard of carrying briefcases coming in for private meetings. Everything's more open here. I really appreciate that.

RU: What are you planning to do specifically with *Electric Minds* to emphasize the community aspect?

HR: First of all, everyone just recognizes that it's the foundation. Just another webzine ain't gonna make it so we *have* to create a lively community of discourse. That means that we build it into the architecture. Abbe Don and Vagabond Jim have spent days and days and days and weeks and weeks and months thinking about how we can design the user interface to integrate the content with the community. So you can get into the conversations very easily from the content and vice versa. The other thing is spending lots of money hiring people around the world to host conversations. You can't throw a really great party just by renting a really big hall. You've got to invite the right people, introduce them to each other, circulate, have some fun things going on, make sure that the conversation stays lively and that the fights happen out in the hallway and not over by the punchbowl.

So, on the editorial side, the contributors are people like Linda Jacobson and Laura Lemay, Jim Warren, Mark Pesce, people who besides writing about bleeding edge technology like to hang out online and schmooze. So everyone is selected for having a predilection for participating in online community. It's not just meet your favorite author. It's your favorite author hosting a discussion that you may have things to contribute to.

JH: IT'S JUST LIKE LIFE! I think that maybe the Internet has been an infant and now it's a teenager. And it's like, we're the Internet's good buddies. And we've got a chance to take the Internet out behind the school and get it high... get it loaded, let it read some dirty comic books and take it to some strip clubs and show it the way...

Vagabond Jim: Bring them some *life!* It's alive!!!

JH: I think the next big thing for web publications is full-on unabashed integration, allowing the readers to create content and integrating that content and privileging that content alongside of the commercial content.

RU: Speaking of being alive, what about the distinctions between virtual and real communities? Spoonman, I associate you with

Unable to participate in our little soirée are other staff members such as:



TECH DEPT

Abbe Don, Executive Producer—formerly of Apple, MIT Media Lab and Kaleida Labs.

Jim Rice, Technology Director and ten-year veteran of MCI.

CONTENT PROVIDERS

Mark Pesce, Creator of VRML

Laura Lemay, Author of *Learning Web Publishing in a Week.*

Linda Jacobson, VR evangelist at Silicon Graphics.

Reiko Chiba, Tokyo's pop diva

Bob Rossney, S.F. Chronicle technology critic.



Hotwired moved us from this really lovable loft building into some industrial sweatshop where Howard collected unemployment checks in the seventies



Burning Man. The great thing about Burning Man is it's proof that a certain type of people still want to get together in realspace.

Spoonman: Yeah yeah yeah yeah! The Net just becomes this kind of infrastructure. Events are clearly on the agenda here. Other events are out there somewhere. Realtime events. Collective events. And they happen by clusters coming together on the Net and plugging, plugging...

RU: Cyborganic has really merged the two, providing a kind of way station for people meeting people... particularly for people in their twenties.

VJ: They've gotten a whole bunch of people from all over the place with similar interests together. You don't know that you don't have a community when you don't have one. You just think it's normal to be basically on your own. And that's the great thing about what we're trying to do with *Electric Minds*. *Electric Minds* will help people find the community that makes sense to them.

THE RELUCTANT SKEPTIC

RU: I have this fantasy that the Web and the Net could be exploited right now to disempower the main corporate-sponsored political parties by migrating the public political discourse there. You could theoretically eliminate money as the main factor in politics and flatten out the power dynamics. But only if the people providing the space for that discourse were inclined to keep it open to equal presentations of all kinds of political opinions and all kinds of political parties. It's an opportunity to give them all equal footing. But you have to be the first one to step up to the plate... and maybe bring in the League of Women Voters. Try to be *the* provider for electronic democracy. I'm wondering if that kind of intent might be part of what you're doing with *Electric Minds*.

HR: No. I haven't really thought of that specifically. I do believe in the *potential* of this medium to democratize discourse by making something of an end run around the mass media, allowing citizens to communicate with each other. But I have to say that since I wrote *The Virtual Community*, I've been hammered by all these people around the world for being too optimistic... and it's worked. I'm now more skeptical.

Today, I just received a very well-reasoned master's thesis from Australia, entirely based on a critique of my book. It looks at all of the pitfalls and weaknesses of the virtual community notion—our relative lack of influence in the real world, the problems of commodification... There are lots of reasons not to expect participatory democracy as a utopian ideal that just springs forth from the Internet just because it theoretically enables it.

However, I would counter anyone who argues that there's no political impact. *Mother Jones* did a great thing where they took the database that tracks all of the votes that all of the legislators make and the database that tracks all the stock buys and sales of all the legislators and put them together in a timeline that showed which legislator bought or sold which stock before or after which votes. [*laughter*]

Now if you combine stuff like that with all of the voices that aren't ordinarily heard in the mass media, and direct communications between citizens, you've got a lot of potential there.

We know, in fact, that people who recognize it as a threat to their power are moving—and have been moving—to control it in every way they can.

RU: When you turn on the TV and some whitebread plastic news show announcer is telling everybody they've just *got* to get hip to the Internet, you've got to be skeptical. You just wanna pull the fucking plug!

S: It's a big push/pull. As the gas factor gets higher, you want to pull yourself away. But hype is just another form of media. It's your job to separate the noise from the signal.

RU: Do you think there are specific things that the wealthy interests and the political interests are doing, maybe even technically, to make it difficult to use the Net in a democratizing way?

HR: The Telecommunications Reform Act. It removed provisions that prevented concentrations of ownership of news media. So we'll see more and more Rupert Murdochs, Ted Turners and Bill Gateses buying up newspapers, radios, TV stations and Internet providers. With that trend, you don't really *need* anything else. If everybody else has to operate at 28.8 and you've got ten megabytes, there's no need to be conspiratorial. The little guys just can't compete.

And then there's all the surveillance capabilities from the Digital Telephony Act to Intelligent Highways to barcode scanners in the grocery store. Once these

are all completely linked up, watch out! There's not enough awareness of how rapidly we're proceeding with things like neighborhood watch video cameras, barcode scanners, mailing lists, converging into something that's gonna have *all* of us shadowed. And it's not mostly Big Brother. It's little brother and little sister. It's gonna be you and me and the person next door scanning the world for *our* little projects. Now we can gather dossiers on 200 million people to find out which ones want to buy our *Mondo 2000*s or our *Electric Minds*, what have you...

RU: In terms of your emphasis on community, do you think this surveillance is a source of intimidation that will stifle discourse?

HR: I don't think people have been specifically intimidated about their postings *yet*. There's certainly things like Dianne Feinstein making hysteria over finding information about building bombs on the Internet. But relatively little has been done, and the courts still seem to support freedom of expression... you've got everybody from Nazis and Holocaust revisionists to Scientologists... all have their stuff up there.

But what we *are* seeing is the cancelbots. It's not just one big monolithic government. Everybody with their own little axe to grind declares war against their own enemies and prevents them from getting there message out. It's sort of anarchic, actually.

RU: The call for censorship comes largely from underneath. It's politicians appealing to majoritarian prejudices. The megacorps—the politicians' sponsors—don't really give a fuck about censorship one way or another.

HR: That's right. It's the Simon Weisenthal Center wanting to shut down the Holocaust revisionists. And the Scientologists want to shut down the people who talk about their secrets. They all have legitimate beefs from their own point of view. And now they have the technical ability to deny these other people the ability to express themselves. I think that we're beginning to experience some of the downside of anarchy. And when things get too chaotic, people want some controls.

LOOK OUT! THERE'S A NAKED TWISTER COMING

RU: Speaking of anarchy, Justin... tell us a bit about "Justin's Links from the Underground."

JH: When I first started it, it was more about the links. It was more of a tour of the Net. Now I've registered www.justin.org and it's this place where I write about various segments, pieces, and components of my life. Like—here's my girlfriend, here's my sexually transmitted disease, here's the drugs I'm taking, here's the schools I've gone to, here's the software jobs I've had. Now I'm writing and posting something new every day. This is what I learned yesterday. And I have my digital camera—and these are the people I talked to. It's become a sort of multimedia diary linked into my life and linked into the Web. So I'm looking at the website as another way to distribute my personal perspective.

I think my generation needs some spiritual guidance. I don't say that I can provide it but I think that I'm in touch with people and ideas that can. So I can synthesize the spiritual guidance that I find in the world and provide it to my generation, people who are equally lost and searching the Web for meaning. And they'll find somebody who's taken the Web and made it personal, made it human. Made it more than information. Something with some soul.

RU: Not to put you too much on the spot but could you give some examples of some guidance or some people who provide such guidance or ideas?

JH: Well, sure. I traveled around the country on a Greyhound bus visiting people who were fans of my website. I was typing all the time in the back of the bus and I developed tendonitis from typing too much. Typing in the back of a Greyhound on a PowerBook will *kill* you. Anyway, I go to this woman healer. She spends half the time working on my arm and the other half lecturing me about the things that I do—what I should and shouldn't do. Like last weekend I went to this party where I wound up playing Naked Twister and being chained to a big black dildo. And so she was just lecturing on how this isn't the right thing for me...

VJ: That party was *NOT* that decadent!

JH: It wasn't but it did weird things to me.

RU: I wish I'd been invited!

JH: It saps my creativity. The things I'd wanted to do I couldn't do because I was thinking about all this weird stuff that had come up because of the party. But the important thing is that I listened to her talk about this. And thinking about these things in my life, I'd go back on my web page and say, "OK. I went to this party. And here's the report on the party and it sound great and sexual and all, but on another level, this bad stuff came up for me. And I was drained. So, you have to decide your priorities.

I'd much rather watch the spin than clock the speed



Spoonman

People will put clothespins on your nipples and spank you because it's amusing to them. But how's that going to leave you...

VJ: They weren't *clothespins*. They were nipple clamps!

JH: OK, but how's that going to leave you feeling at the end of the day? Anyway, I put this lady's wisdom up on my web page. And maybe somebody else who's going through a similar thing will find that.

RU: You've had a really great response, I know. How many people check it out?

JH: Well, as I've left behind my sexual pursuits and made it more spiritual, I've lost about 20,000 daily readers. But I still have about 7,000 daily readers.

RU: You provide a lot of links also.

JH: Not as much any more. Now I just provide utility links. Like, I'm doing research on Kali, the blood-sucking death goddess. I went to a strip club when I was in Lawrence, Kansas. And just going to a strip club brings up all this stuff about sex. I was very under-educated. So I use the Net to educate myself. And then I created a page that has all these links to pages about Kali and I link that into the strip club narrative. All these 23-year-old, mother-of-two-on-anti-depressants women linked with the story of Kali from the Internet. This is the metaphor I use to understand and present this weirdo scene in Kansas.

RU: It's a kind of journalism.

JH: *Journal*-ism. Journey oriented.

OVER THE COUNTERCULTURE

RU: What do you think of the notion that people who provide content for free as part of a community—when that community is actually somebody's property and participation is being sold—are at some level being exploited?

HR: Well, that's Carmen Hermosillo's theory. And the thing is, she developed this theory while hanging out on the Well. And all the money there has gone towards keeping the machine running. As a profit-making organization, it's a failure!

RU: I assume that you want *Electric Minds* to be successful.

HR: Yeah, sure. But the goal isn't to make a jillion dollars. The goal is to be able to pay people and do something interesting.

JH: Commodification will probably be the main source of tension. I mean, I run "Links from the Underground" on reader donations and $50 advertisements. I'm shoestringing it. And if I lose a thousand readers in a day, nobody really notices or

cares. But when there's a million dollars invested, you've got to make the return on the investments. I mean, I don't think *Electric Minds* will have any trouble at all providing a place for Howard to teach, and for him to bring in his friends to teach. If we do nothing else, if we only build up a structure to present some valuable discussions, that'll be great from my perspective. If the investors can step back and say, "Oh I can visit *Electric Minds* and learn something. And there's schools all over the country using the material." But I think whether the investors make their money back will be the main source of tension.

HR: Wouldn't it be great if Americans supported the artists with their tax dollars? Wouldn't it be great if we didn't have to sell ads in order to pay people decently? If you're an artist in the Netherlands, the money appears in your bank account every month. Of course, there's a 60% income tax rate. Americans don't like to pay taxes for anything other than basic services. I mean, we're closing down *fire departments.*

RU: Well, government handouts haven't *ended* fire so... [*laughter*]

HR: So, the question, is this commodification? Yes it is. I wish it didn't have to be. What's the solution? The working classes are going to revolt and set up a dictatorship of the proletariat and then resources will be allocated fairly? I mean...

RU: But just looking at it from a really broad perspective, not taking it so personally. Looking at the amount of money being made off the Net and the Web, the value that's accrued to Netscape and Yahoo! and Microsoft. Contrast that with the value being put into this system by content providers and what *we're* getting in return. Shouldn't some of this money go back in the other direction? It could be a resolution to the unemployment problem... lots of people paid to be content providers...

HR: Yeah, I like the idea. We're trying to do just that. It starts with a minority of people being paid to make great conversation. That's a start.

The whole idea of The River is exactly that. The people who make the conversation, which is the content, which is the product, own and govern it. It's a co-op.

Of course, the thing is that co-ops are really raucous and endlessly argumentative. Endless boring arguments till the only people left are the ones who like to argue.

Either way, there's problems. I think one thing that's uniquely American is that we think that problems have solutions.

VJ: But one of the things I love here is that every time I come to work, something new happens that changes how you think about things. Different approaches to design. Things come up that I wouldn't think of if it weren't for the creative environment and collaboration. Things happen in your brain that wouldn't ordinarily happen. It's why I like drugs and it's why I like collaborations. The people around you modify your brain. M+2

CYBERSPACE COMMODITY

AN INTERVIEW WITH HUMDOG

humdog, or Carmen Hermosillo, has been driving people absolutely insane on The Well and other bulletin boards for years with her unpopular opinions, her unalloyed directness, her prickly exasperation with women-as-victims, and her very distinctive deconstructionist style. Some say she's just flatout illogical, but I've always found her to be one of the more insightful voices on the net.

Now she's putting together an organization to represent people who have a particular talent for generating web content, people whose economic interests have not been represented up to this point. Her mission statement says that she will be "handling people who have track records specific to new media and cyberspace."

She has described herself as "a fourth-generation Latin American anarchist" and "one of the thirty-six immortal poison pens of cyberspace."

—R.U. Sirius

R.U. Sirius: You've written a controversial essay in Peter Ludlow's book, *High Noon on the Electronic Frontier* in which you portray virtual community as a kind of scam that particularly rips off the more vocal participants. You've been a pretty vocal participant online yourself. How did you come to your conclusions?

humdog: I think that what I noticed most in my time on the Net over the last few years was that the issue of the value of content and content providers was never addressed. It seemed to me more and more evident that there was an assumption that content should just be provided, or worse, that people should *pay* for the privilege of providing it. In the "pandora's vox" essay, I began to address that issue by pointing out how interaction is commodified on the Net.

Then I noticed that whereas tech people made comfortable livings, content people for the most part did not. And yet, tech and content, on the net, exist in synergy. That synergy has been mostly ignored.

So finally it came to me: I had to raise consciousness about the importance of content providers. There is too much information on the web. The web has essentially annihilated

information, and people who do not understand the requirements of writing for the net will be buried alive in the avalanche. So I decided to start an agency for content providers—people who have track records in cspace. Many of these cspace writers are more well known on the net than they are in print. This isn't surprising, though, because print and net are as different as codex and book; it's a completely different form of communication. So I decided I would make this agency so that those people who really wanted their net and multi-media content to work would have access to those writers who understood the medium.

It was just that simple. You just can't do new media like you do the older forms. It's a completely different literary form, a completely different aesthetic. Most people don't get that.

RU: We've been talking to Howard Rheingold and some of the *Electric Minds* people. Do you see yourself in a kind of opposition to their idealistic, or perhaps naïve, vision of online community?

H: I do not oppose *Electric Minds*. I just disagree with its assumptions. First, I think that information-shop-keepers might want to think about less being more. In cspace everything changes very quickly. So quickly, I think, that the whole idea of "early-adopter" is going to become meaningless very soon, largely due to the *variety* of developments that will become available. Market segments are going to become very tiny, even for narrowcasters. Already you can see that occuring if you look.

Also, again with the content thing. It just strikes me as absurd to think that people will show up just for the joy of giving away stuff. Conversational systems appear to require sacrificial victims—you need people on these systems who are available for exploitation; people who are new to the Net, who have great minds and who have no idea of the value of what they're giving away. The more people become aware of the value of their contributions, the less likely they are to contribute.

The only way I see online conferencing working in the future is as a real conferencing tool for very small, specialized working groups of people with common interests, or as a big board where a certain percentage of the contributors are paid for contributing a certain number of postings per week.

I mean really, if somebody gave me a million dollars to set up a system, I would spend a big chunk of the money assuring that there was a very high level of quality content easily available and accessible to lurkers. Lurkers are in the majority; they are the spectators and the audience. I would make sure that they got a good show, and I would do the quality control myself.

RU: Your piece in Peter Ludlow's book caused a lot of controversy, partly because it raised this whole issue of the so-called Cyber Cad that generated so much publicity and heat on The Well there a few years ago. But leaving that aside, why do you think pointing out that community is being commodified created such a hostile reaction?

H: I know about the fuss. I got letters, and at least one topic was started in honor of the Vox article to make sure that I tasted of their Displeasure. Some of the stuff I read was quite vitriolic, but on the whole lacked style. And the most incendiary stuff tended to be written by those who had been least successful in commodifying themselves. Go figure.

Cspace and computer technology in general is sort of a California-based mythology and paradigm. Because it's Californian, it almost *has* to contain elements of utopian thinking, because California has been the last refuge of American utopian social thought for at least the last hundred years. Cspace, in lots of ways, has brought exchange value not only to social interaction (which is what I said in the Vox) but it also, by making social utopianism into a commodity, destroyed the concept of the Romantic Utopia. Pointing this out to people is not likely to make them very happy, particularly if they're longterm subscribers. I could go even further with this, and say that a case could be made for looking at the whole online deal as a form of modernist spiritual practice, or sanctification of sorts, because people act as if they believe that putting information into a machine somehow changes it, as if a kind of electronic transubstantiation had taken place. They put regular ol' them into the conferencing system, and a new, more perfect simulation of them emerges from the system. It is a sign value thing. Truly. Only in cspace can one do that, but the road to this slippery ID place was prepared by advertising. M2

Carmen can be reached at humdog2@netcom.com

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William Gibson: Live and Unmediated

"I feel like I've been run through a fax machine too many times," jokes Wlliam Gibson as he smokes a "Rothmans Special" in front of Zare's, a garden restaurant just a frisbee toss away from the world's most famous counter-cultural hang-out and street corner: San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury. After bouncing up and down both coasts to promote the publication of his latest novel, Idoru, *Gibson looks wearied but still exudes a disarming enthusiasm for an exotic blend of "science fictional scenarios," ranging from the human/artificial-intelligence romance in* Idoru *to his passion for "Atomic Disintegrator Guns." This and much more from The Man who started it all, but is too humble or too embarassed to admit it...*

Mondo 2000: What was your initial idea for *Idoru* and how did it evolve as you developed the book?

William Gibson: I'd been reading an article about the Japanese music industry about the idoru phenomenon. It's an assembly line of little-girl/singing-starlet/Milli Vanilli sort of thing ordinarily. But this article had mentioned one case in which the idoru hadn't existed at all. They just made her up from whole cloth, and there was no girl behind the record. It was just somebody singing, and somebody else's picture. For some reason, that really intrigued me, and I thought it seemed resonant in some way. I started thinking about artificial intelligences and computer-generated characters in films and Max Headroom and Jessica Rabbit and things like that. And I had the idea of a very famous human pop star dismaying his management by publicly announcing he was going to marry an idoru... when everyone, this pop star, his management, the whole world knows she doesn't exist, that she's like something on a mainframe somewhere. And yet this guy says, "No, it's true love. We'll find a way." Basically, that's sort of a sketch of the idea I gave Putnam.

M2: Rez, the pop star, has a lifestyle where his assistants do everything for him. He and the idoru seem oddly suited for each other.

WG: Absolutely. By nature of being mediated, the celebrity is already more like the idoru than anyone realizes. He's already more like *her* than like a normal person.

M2: So *Idoru* is a commentary on the sheltered lives of mega-stars.

WG: Yeah. At some level this book is an investigation of the mechanisms of celebrity in a highly mediated society such as ours.

WHILE YOU SHOWER, WE WATCH

M2: How do you think humans will change as they begin to merge more deeply with technology?

WG: I don't really think that it's knowable, in the same way that I don't think that our grandparents or even our parents could have imagined our relationship today with technology.

M2: That's true. Just the changes over the last twenty years have been unimaginable.

WG: Yeah, it's quite unprecedented. I really don't think of myself as having much of a predictive function, and I'm fairly dubious of science fiction's claim to have a predictive function. Yes, you can say Arthur C. Clarke did describe communication satellites in the 1930's, but there's scarcely any science fiction published prior to the advent of broadcast television that described anything remotely like what we do with TV. Even though the idea and indeed the reality of television have been around for quite a while.



Illustration by Larry Goode

By Tom McIntyre

Television appeared in any number of science fiction stories. It was a standard element. But usually it appeared in the guise of the "Video Phone." And the Video Phone is a good example, because there's a technology that's never gone anywhere. They keep trying to get people into it, but it seems like it's never going to happen. People will be doing the same thing over the Net, but they won't need special-purpose Video Phones.

M2: And that also could raise a lot of privacy problems—if you're getting out of the shower to answer the phone. [*laughter*]

WG: Well, it probably would be a tweaked version of yourself that would answer for you, kind of an improved version.

M2: How far away do you think we are from having artificial intelligences that approach the sophistication of the idoru in your novel?

WG: I have no idea. There's a line I like in the novel where it says, "Laney had once heard a speech by a guy who was an AI expert and from what Laney had heard in his speech he thought it was unlikely that the first artificial intelligences would be things that were personal, that pretend to be beautiful girls." Actually, my hunch would be that AI would come about inadvertently, and that we may well not recognize it as such initially.

M2: I wonder if they could eventually become autonomous. The idoru in the novel is still maintained by the company that designed her.

WG: Yeah, well I think that's probably in the more realistic future given the time frame of this novel than encountering something like Wintermute in *Neuromancer*. But the way I use AI is probably much more metaphorical in intent. I'm not a scientist. I'm kind of into the poetics of it.

M2: How do you think human memory itself is being affected by our interaction with technology?

WG: Well, there's one little part of *Idoru* that I'm quite fond of where Chia, who's 14, is thinking about how her sense of "now" is so much more elastic than her mother's. Her mother thinks "now" is like right now, this minute. But Chia's sense of "now" is supported by all of this computer memory which she never even has to think about. It's just effortlessly available, and that's how she can be really really into a band whose members are now old enough to be her parents. And her mother finds this kind of disturbing, that her daughter likes these old guys.

M2: Lo-Rez's first album was released a few days before she was even born.

WG: Yeah, but for Chia, Lo-Rez lives in this big elastic time thing. And in a sense they'll *always* be 20 years old and just bringing out the first album. And I think that's approaching a truth there. I probably didn't pin it entirely, but it still feels to me like that approaches something that's happening. I mean, you meet a 14-year-old who's like totally into Led Zeppelin. That's very interesting. I don't think that used to happen in quite the same way.

M2: There used to be more of a generational schism, I think.

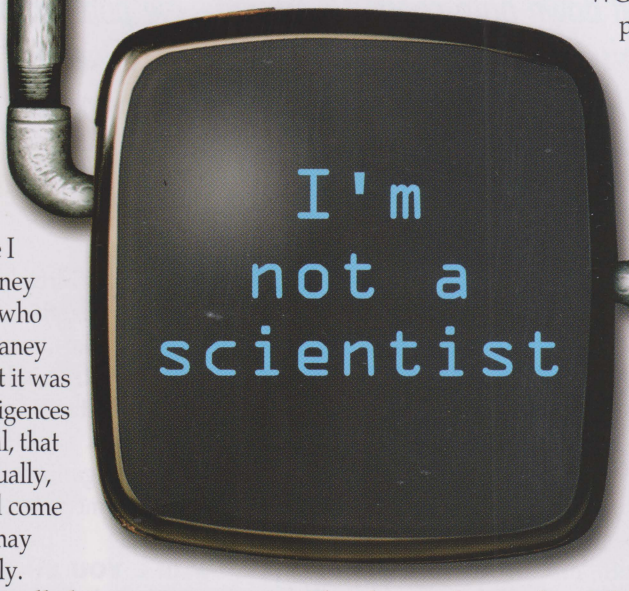
WG: Yeah, it's not there at all. I mean, my daughter's 14, and we have a lot of the same favorites on AM radio. She's getting off on Alanis Morrisette as much as I am. There's this wonderful magazine from England called *Mojo*. It's my favorite music magazine. Its demographic is basically me. Its demographic is people in their late forties who've always loved rock-n-roll but who've remained open to contemporary sounds of one type or another. So every month, I go buy this expensive imported magazine. It isn't so much a nostalgia magazine as one whose idea of pop is completely unmoored in time.

BUBBLE GUM AVANT GARDE NODAL POINTS

M2: Could you talk a little bit about Laney's character and the notion of nodal points in your novel?

WG: It didn't occur to me until recently, but I suspect that Laney and what he does with the nodal points is a kind of unconscious approximation of what I do with reality in order to produce these fictions...

M2: How so?



WG: In a sense, I've always kept my eyes peeled for the nodal points, for the point at which change appears on the verge of emerging. Laney can surf these enormous flows of data, and I do it too with media, particularly with magazines. When I'm really working on a book, I pretty much stop reading fiction altogether and start buying hundreds of dollars worth of magazines of every conceivable type. I just keep flipping through them looking for bits of reality that I can import into the novel—sort of rub them against something else until I produce a spark. Or until a new surface is formed. It's a reality-based process. I constantly need a lot of material.

M2: Where's a place in *Idoru* where you used this technique?

WG: Let me see. It's so far back... [*searching through his PowerBook, looking through* Idoru *notes*] If I do my job well, I've got it all airbrushed. OK. The café that Laney goes to in Tokyo that's completely done in bubblegum and chewing gum. The entrance is a collage of millions of pieces of chewed gum, and he feels like he's going into

this weird nodular pink gullet. That's based on a verbal description of somebody's art that I overheard at an art party a couple of years ago. They said, "There's this guy, and he's really hot. He chews gum all of the time and he glues the gum to canvases and makes these pieces." This is being discussed very seriously. [*laughter*] And I just sort of filed it away. Then I expanded it, spun it out into an entire fictive environment which becomes one of the points of that chapter. It's saying something... I don't know what! [*laughs*]

TURNING THE KILL FILES INSIDE OUT OR GIBSON BABBLE ON RINGS TRUE

M2: Did "the Walled City" in *Idoru* arise from a need for greater privacy on an Internet that became too commercial?

WG: I am suggesting that, but it's only a suggestion. I think that idea probably originated when someone told me about a discussion group he had found on the Net. People were basically talking about trying to find a way to secede from the net at large and create a private realm for themselves where they would enjoy complete autonomy.

M2: So this is actually some kind of "kill file" that's turned inside out?

WG: Well, you know, that's "Gibson babble." [*laughter*] I ran that by a friend of mine who knows more about these things than I do, and he said it didn't inherently *not* make sense, you know? [*laughter*] I had that one checked. But I have no idea whether this would be the way to do it or not.

JOHNNY GETS HIS WEBSITE

M2: You've got a website?

WG: Yeah, that's only there because of a very, very talented guy named Christopher Halcrow.

M2: Are you closely involved with its content?

WG: Oh yeah. When he's not busy with his real world gigs, we talk about it daily on the phone. In fact, I talked to him last night, and he's in the process of putting up a Shockwave version of *Agrippa*, which actually has the photographs from my father's snapshot album that inspired the poem. So you can read the poem and see the pictures.

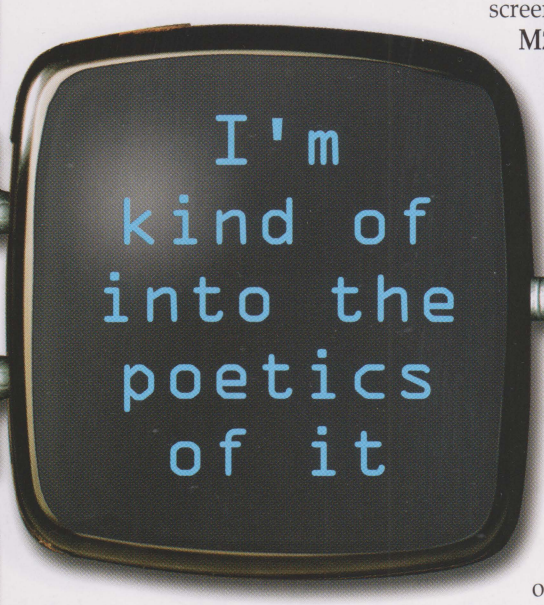
We have another big project, which is called "Mnemonic Pictures." It was Robert Longo's way of saying goodbye to his movie. It's 24 black-and-white lithographic frame grabs from the movie. It's a pretty amazing piece of work. Maybe the closest anyone will ever *get* to getting a sense of the film we were trying to make.

M2: What happened to *Johnny Mnemonic?* Did Robert Longo lose control of the final cut of the movie?

WG: Yeah, essentially.

M2: What were some of the changes that the studio made?

WG: Well, it's a little too complicated to go into in an interview, but if you read the shooting script, that's the film we actually shot, word-by-word, frame-by-frame. And it's a *very different* movie than what they released. The changes were made very late in post-production by Tri-Star, who was the distributor and, by that point, the main backer of the film. And these changes were mostly made in response to those recruited audience screenings, a few of which I attended.



M2: Those can be dangerous.

WG: The making of that picture was overall a very exciting and pleasant experience for me. And then, nothing could be as *loathsome* as going to the recruited audience screenings and watching your film being chopped up because somebody who isn't very smart doesn't get something.

M2: Can you give a couple of examples of things that were changed?

WG: Well, the whole business of Johnny wanting his memory back—which is introduced in that first scene of the movie—wasn't even there in the original. And Keanu inexplicably is 20 pounds heavier in that scene than he is in the rest of the movie because it was shot eight months after we'd finished the film... at Tri-Star's insistence. And to my mind, and I know to Keanu's as well, that new theme completely destroys the integrity of his performance. I was absolutely opposed to that, and so was Robert [Longo], but, you know, when it's their $30 million...

M2: Did they change it because they felt that people needed to have a stronger emotional involvement with Johnny's character?

WG: Yeah, they were always very very uncomfortable with Johnny as I'd written him and as Keanu really rather brilliantly portrayed him.

M2: Johnny's kind of an empty vessel.

WG: Yes, indeed. Bordering on brain damaged. And I wanted a character who was an absolute shit at the beginning of the film but who managed, by the end of it, to become human, to do something for somebody else, something for humanity. And they just couldn't handle having this cold little shit of a guy running through the first two acts of the movie being amoral and absolutely self-centered. But that's what it was about.

M2: I hope that footage at least has been saved? Maybe at some point they can put together a director's cut or something.
WG: It'll never happen. For one thing, it would be enormously expensive because we'd need a new score. I really intensely dislike the score they released. It was very expensive, done at the last minute, and we'd intended the whole thing to be set to really raw rock music. We had some really great stuff. And between the score and the politics of Sony Music and the release of the soundtrack album—which is a very big deal in the film business these days—we lost all that. If you want to see something that is the closest thing available to what we were shooting for, the version released in Japan is fifteen minutes longer, and has a completely different feeling. And it's not dubbed either. It's subtitled. It's got very cool Japanese subtitles going up the sides...

M2: About something I saw on your web site... Atomic Disintegrator Guns. Did you have one as a kid?
WG: Yes, I did. A couple of years ago I became afflicted by middle age Boomer nostalgia. I started scanning toy-collecting magazines, to run down a few space toys I had when I was a little kid. And I obtained them at a grotesque expense. I think the Atomic Disintegrator Gun cost $250 American. Whereas when it was new, it probably cost something like—

M2: Seventy-five cents?
WG: Well, it would've been a bit more. As I say on the web site, It's better made than many Saturday Night Specials.

M2: You described the handle as being like a bowie knife.
WG: Yeah, and we're working on a whole series of those. We just haven't got them up yet. We've got Robert the Robot, the Talking Mechanical Man from Ideal Toys, and some little generic space figurines that I remember playing with.

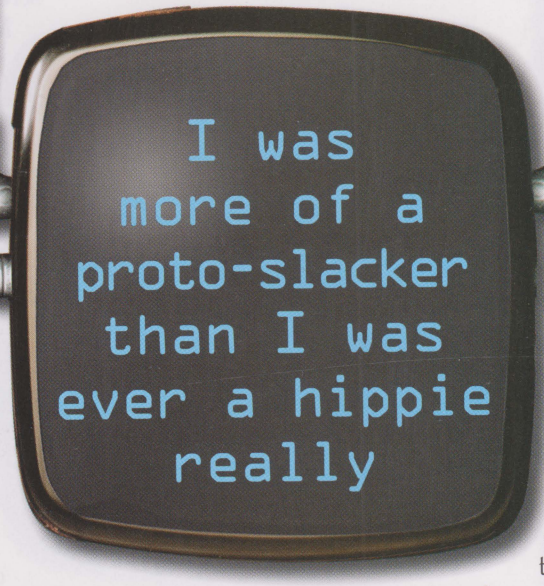
ACCIDENTAL NEUROMANTIC

M2: Were you an avid science fiction reader and space program fan as a kid?
WG: Oh, yeah, I was an archetypal science fiction fan from about 12 to 15. And then puberty hit and I lost interest until I was about 30.

M2: Something very similar happened to me. When I was a kid I had a G.I. Joe that came with a space capsule and a 45 rpm recording of Alan Shepard's first flight in space. I was totally into anything about space, and the science fiction programs that were on television. Then I lost interest until five or six years ago. Now, I'm actually writing a science fiction novel.
WG: It probably doesn't have astronauts and space ships in it though. *That's* the difference. Actually we sort of need a science fiction toolkit to describe the world we live in. We live in what seems to me to be an overlapping set of science fiction scenarios. Scenarios that feel like science fiction. The AIDS scenario is a perfect example. Or the hole in the ozone layer. I mean, all of that is the province of science fiction. But in science fiction, you have closure. They fix the hole in the ozone, or they cure AIDS. But you don't necessarily get that in real life.

M2: So what renewed your interested in science fiction in the late 1970's? Was there a particular book or something that re-engaged you?
WG: No. I'd reached a point where I was sort of a post-grad without being in a post-graduate program. I either had to get another degree to have an excuse to be a slacker or do something else. I was more of a proto-slacker than I was ever like a hippie really. And most fellow proto-slackers were suddenly showing this alarming desire to become lawyers and actually have careers. So I thought, well, I've always vaguely wanted to be an artist of some kind, and I got really good marks in English. Maybe I'll have a shot at doing some writing. And because I knew about the business culture of science fiction from having been a fan in my teens, I knew there was a pretty recognizable entry level mechanism there. So I thought it would be easier if I could get a rep writing short fiction. Then I could probably get a novel published more easily than just going in cold. I published three or four short stories and my take on that was that I was three or four years away from having the skills necessary to produce a novel.

M2: And then suddenly you had it sort of dumped in your lap.
WG: Yeah, Terry Carr, who was acting as a kind of talent scout for Ace books was recruiting ten or twelve people to produce first novels as a series called Terry Carr's Ace Specials. And Terry was an anthologist so he knew the field of new writers as well as anyone, and he had taste. So I was one of the people he hit on. Initially I said no. I tried to weasel out of it. And he said, "No, you've got to do this. Give it a try." And that was *Neuromancer*.



WHITE CYBERPUNKS ON MOPE

M2: This is your sixth novel, including *The Difference Engine* which you co-wrote with Bruce Sterling. How has writing all of these novels helped you with writing a novel like *Idoru*? Do you feel more confident with each novel you write ?
WG: No, I don't really. It's terrible. I go through really boring,

terrible depressions every time I write a book. I go through months of absolute aesthetic despair. My wife has learned to recognize the stages of it: I come out of the basement and I say, "Not only is this the worst book I've ever written, but it's the worst book anyone has ever written." [*laughter*] And then she says, "Oh, that means you're really close to the end, dear."

M2: You've said that information wants to be free. With so much of what you've written now being on the Internet, do you think that there could come a time when it becomes difficult for writers to earn a living?

WG: Well, you know, book publishing, compared to the music business or films, is a cottage industry in America. This was really brought home to me this morning when a friend of mine who's a book distributor in North Carolina said in a fax to me, "One person in three hundred will buy the next Stephen King novel in America." That's a factoid, and it's an actual figure, and I thought, "Wow, only one in three hundred."

M2: And he's such an immensely popular author.

WG: Yeah, and Stephen King has the broadest, deepest market penetration of any writer in the world probably. One in three hundred. But I don't know, it's very strange. I travel around the country, and there are these huge bookstores everywhere, and that's new. In some ways, it seems like people are more interested in reading.

M2: A lot of people find the tactile sensation of having a hard copy infinitely more satisfying than having to read information off of a computer screen.

WG: Yeah, and if you're not too fastidious, you can read it in the bathtub. You can drop it out of a second story window. I mean, it's got a lot going for it. But it's basically a block of decaying vegetable matter, and the fact that it's made out of an only partially renewable resource is, I think, rather worrying. I was at an architectural conference in Santa Monica several years ago, and Rem Koolhaas, this brilliant young European architect, got up and gave a presentation on a design of his for the new Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. He didn't win the competition, but it was an absolutely mind-blowing structure: The exterior walls were video screens that crawled with patches of Rimbaud depending on the weather. It had different texts crawling over this building all the time, and I thought it was just great. We applauded him, and I turned to this very intelligent young woman who happened to be sitting beside me and I said, "That's a great library." And she looked at me with absolute contempt and said, "A library is something on the end of a modem." [*laughter*]

I actually think I know what the future of the book is, if we go far enough into the future. I think each of us will own a book. It'll be a really beautiful book with pages that feel really good and whenever you open it, it will be whatever book you want it to be. Yeah. In order to keep authors solvent, you would be debited a certain amount each time the potential for a new text was downloaded to your book.

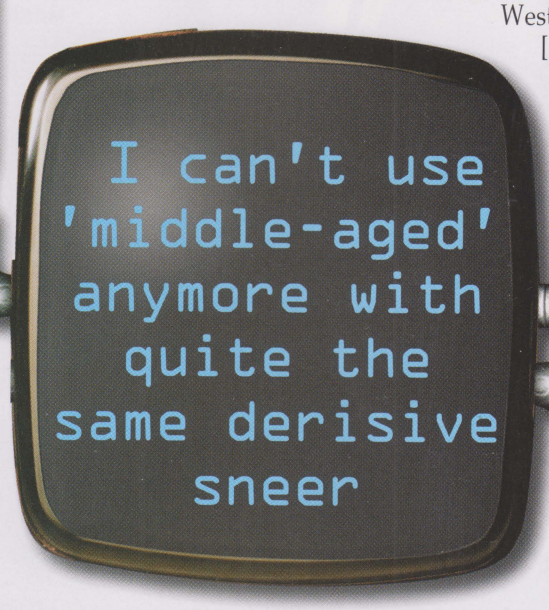
M2: It still seems that if you see pictures of people at a WorldCon SF convention, almost all of the writers are middle-aged white people. It doesn't seem like science fiction has much multicultural reach as far as authors.

WG: Yeah, it's middle-aged white guys. I mean, there's Samuel Delany and Octavia Butler, and a couple of others. But by and large, it's middle-aged Caucasoids and occasionally younger Caucasoids.

I guess my cohort in science fiction [Bruce Sterling] is just now entering middle age, as indeed am I. So I can't use "middle-aged" anymore with quite the same derisive sneer. [*laughter*]

M2: Why do you think science fiction hasn't attracted more non-white writers?

WG: [*pauses*] One reason might be because science fiction is pretty directly a product of the Modern program, which is a Western European program. Modernity, as we've known it, didn't come from the Mediterranean, it didn't come from Africa, it came from Western Europe. It's ending, of course. [*laughs*]



M2: What are some books that you've been enjoying in recent months?

WG: Let's see. Have you read Sterling's new one, *Holy Fire?*

M2: No, not yet. I just picked up a copy of it a few days ago.

WG: It's absolutely brilliant. You know how much I admire the guy, as a science fiction writer anyway. I think this book is a quantum leap for him. It's just a major, major, major book. It's a curious book in that it's set in what is, in effect, a very near-future utopia. But in this utopia some people are very very dissatisfied. But it's a novel in a way that I don't think Bruce has ever written a novel before. It's a novel in a very accomplished, very grown up way. The techy stuff is brilliant, but it's a very human story. Very moving.

I also really liked Jack Womack's new book, *Let's Put the Future Behind Us.* I'm re-reading Iain Sinclair's *Radon Daughters* which has never found a publisher in the United States. He's one of my favorite writers, and this is

only his second novel. The first one is available in the U.S. in a hardcover called *Downriver*. He's a marvelous writer, very eccentric. I've also been reading a really cool little non-fiction trade paperback called *The Death of Hitler*, which is based on a lot of Russian intelligence files that nobody knew they had.

INFORMATION WANTS TO BE HOARDED BY HIS WIFE AND KIDS

M2: How has your own relationship with computers evolved? I know that you're on the bottom of the food chain in your own family. Did you ever get around to having an e-mail account or net access?

WG: Everybody else in the house has a computer that's at least capable of web surfing. I still don't. I actually need one now that I have *The Yard Show* (www.vkool.com/gibson/index1.html) going, so I won't have to be going in and bothering my wife or my son to look at what Chris has done to the site. I still don't use e-mail at all. In effect, I don't have an e-mail address, but that's really just a way of protecting the necessary degree of solitude that it requires to write fiction. I mean, I have enough problems with the telephone and the fax machine and snail mail that if I added something else, then it's going to be that much less time for me to write. Plus, my professional life consists of sitting on my butt in front of a computer typing so the last thing I want to do is check my e-mail and type some more. For me, I have to watch out for time sinks and, you know, e-mail is one. Checking out the Web is another.

M2: It seems like there's an ongoing struggle for the soul of the Internet. On the one hand, you've got all these wonderful, informative, sometimes subversive sites. And on the other, you've got the U.S. Government and large corporations both trying to assert their influence. Who's winning?

WG: I was in Washington a few days ago, and I was being interviewed for a techno-politics show on the radio and the guy who was interviewing me told me that the word around Washington was that next year they were going to get seriously down to figuring out how to tax the Internet. I said, "Tax the Internet?"

M2: That's kind of frightening.

WG: Yeah, packet taxes. Sterling and I went to this thing at the National Academy of Sciences in Washington several years ago. We were "mau-mauing" them as Tom Wolfe said. I mean, we'd been brought in as professional shit disturbers. [*laughter*] And so it was a little over the top, but we did our thing and then this guy from the telephone company came up to me afterwards and said, [*whispering*] "How can I buy shares of the Internet?" And I said, "You can't buy shares." Then he says, "Maybe we could tax it?"

The Internet was designed to implement communication under conditions of nuclear adversity. You know, it's a switching system. The Internet is there because the Defense Department told DARPA to figure out a way that they could communicate after a major nuke-out.

M2: Really?

WG: Yeah, the Internet is the inadvertent outcome of a DARPA think tank contract.

M2: So far, we've got LSD and the Internet to thank the government for. [*laughter*]

WG: It's the *inadvertent* effects of technology that fascinate me. I do think that what we're seeing in the Internet and now on the Web is something that may one day seem as historically significant as the advent of cities.

M2: We're seeing all of these virtual enclaves emerging where you don't necessarily have to share geographical space.

WG Yeah, this is post-geography. And I think it's probably fair to say that a nation state would be threatened by something that, in effect, repeals geography. Nation states are about borders and hierarchical control. And all I can say about that really is that I hope that the architecture of the Net will continue to preclude hierarchical control.



MORE GUM?

M2: Do you think the movement towards developing AI and nanotechnology is fulfilling some kind of subconscious desire for immortality?

WG: Hmm. I don't know how subconscious it is. People like Eric Drexler want to be immortal. That's why my brain sort of freezes when I get to thinking seriously about nanotechnology. Because these guys are saying, "Well, when we get this stuff on-line, we're all going to be immortal and money won't mean anything because anybody can have anything they want." And I just can't wrap my head around that one.

I think that probably represents what Vernor Vinge has called a "technological singularity." He believes that we might be approaching a point where we will create a technology into which all history will be sucked and irrevocably changed. And when we come out on the other side, we aren't going to be anything remotely like human. And we'll sort of be looking back at what we are now.

M2: How do you think people can retain their humanity as corporate power continues to solidify?
WG: Oh, that's a big question. I don't know. You just have to do it any way you can. I mean, some of us can do more than others. That guy who draws Dilbert does a lot right there.

I always get pissed off when a certain kind of lazy journalist who kind of looks over the William Gibson file and starts the article by saying, "William Gibson writes about amoral characters in an amoral society in the near future." I've never really done that. I've written about people who sometimes are reluctantly moral characters trying to remain human in a landscape of terminal capitalism.

Actually, one of the places in the world that I'm most interested in right now in terms of capitalism is Russia. Russia is capitalism with no brakes. They never developed any of the restraints that are part of our culture so you're seeing capitalism acted out with the utmost brutality, and I think that's going to be absolutely fascinating.

M2: Some people are getting very rich and a lot of others are starving to death.
WG: Yeah. Jack Womack's a good friend of mine and he was in Moscow a few months ago to cover the presidential election for *Spin*. He says that it's just staggeringly weird there. He thought it was probably the most interesting place in the world right now.



Photo by Tom McIntyre

M2: More interesting evan than Singapore?
WG: Singapore's not interesting. That's the trouble. Singapore's *boring*.

M2: Well, it's fascinating in that it is so boring and sterile.
WG: Yeah, it's like I said in that article I did for *Wired*. Nothing could depress me more than thinking that that's the future. Because in a weird way, Singapore's the only place that's ever realized Robert Heinlein's ideal futures from the 40's. It's just this spotless law-abiding police state where the policeman is pretty much internalized by the citizens. It's like what Burroughs would say, "They got the policeman inside."

M2: Exactly. What's disturbing is that it really seems to be thriving too.
WG: Oh, absolutely. It's very disturbing. Though I have heard that there are starting to be cracks in the facade and the younger generation is starting to act up a little bit. I don't know what they're doing: chewing gum behind closed doors. [*laughter*] I think that's definitely a positive sign. M2



A conversation with Chris Hudak

The Paranoid Hoaxter's Grey Alien Society

DROWNED GOD

Game as Acted Out by HARRY HORSE

You there, on the other side of the monitor...

Conspiracy aficionado and former hoaxter *extraordinaire* Harry Horse has some news for you, and it might just be some *baaaaaaad* shit: What if everything you knew about your planet, its history and its people—all the dribs and drabs of information and lore and wisdom that have come into your possession through education and cultural immersion—turned out to be wrong, really *wrong* wrong, a deliberate, intricate meta-hoax spanning the years, the decades, the centuries? This is the question posed by *Drowned God: Conspiracy of the Ages*, an attractive, SGI-rendered adventure game addressing all the scriptures of the paranoid and then some: Atlantis, the Bermuda Triangle, Roswell, the Illuminati, the lost work of da Vinci, the Cargo Cults—and the real story behind Noah's Ark. In *Drowned God*, players assume the roles of their past incarnations and discover that, once upon an age, they played a crucial role in what we call history. In a *Myst*-style adventure, players explore four historical realms, solving the puzzles—some utilizing what are believed to be the rules of ancient games found in Roman, Mayan and Egyptian ruins—which will reveal the Great Deception(s) we have proceeded under since the dawn of recorded time. Some one or some thing has been at work, forming and guiding and sculpting human destiny with preternatural slowness and tenacity. How? Why? More to the point, *What?*


Photo illustration by: Steve Double

Mondo 2000: In your own words, how would you describe the basic premise of *Drowned God*?

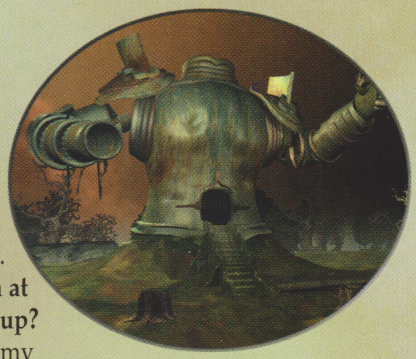
Harry Horse: I'd say probably that it was an alternative history of the planet, regarding certain secret societies that have been operating since way, way back through to the present day with our own possible secret governments. It's about unraveling what legends have been set up around a possible truth, and challenging that truth.

M2: Are the secret societies used in the game portrayed in a sympathetic light, or an ominous one?

HH: God, that's a million-dollar question. Something like the Illuminati is particularly difficult to handle. I would rather not comment on that at this time. *Drowned God* is a huge undertaking; to try and pull all these different elements into a CD-ROM... it's nigh-on impossible.

M2: How long have you been working on the game?

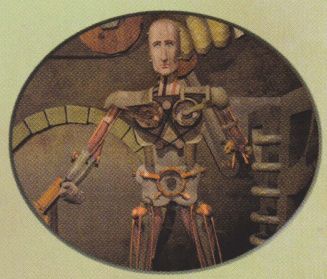
HH: Producing and directing it... about two and a half years. But



he'd published 45 books in his lifetime. And that set *me* off on a search for this guy, and one of the first lines I read by Richard Horne was *"What were we, if our souls have lived before?"*... pure reincarnation.

M2: You didn't know about him at the time you'd made this name up?

HH: Not at all. My real name, my birth name, is Richard Horne. I had *no idea* about this other Horne character. Now consider this: *Diary of a Plagiarist* was written in 1983; the last book that *he* wrote in his lifetime was written in 1883, and it was called *Sithron the Star-Stricken*. It's a 12th century manuscript discovered under the ruins of Solomon's Temple. If *that's* not a clue, I don't know what is, what with the connection between Solomon's Temple and Atlantis. You know, all the post-Flood knowledge that's supposed to have gone underground to the Masonic set. So *Drowned God* is a springboard for all amateur historians. I put a bibliography into the





I'm giving away all my secrets here, aren't I?



longer than that when you consider that I wrote *Diary of a Plagiarist* in 1983. That was the original source and inspiration for the game.

M2: Tell us a little bit about that episode, for the uninitiated.

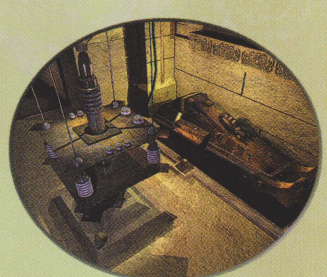
HH: *Diary* was a series of forgeries. There were twelve volumes. I signed them Drahcir Enroh—my real name, Richard Horne, spelled backwards. The books were an account, written in 1846, of a post-Flood Atlantis. It's about what happened to "the Knowledge," and how it went underground... basically, we're talking about the Illuminati. I sold the books to an antiques dealer in Edinburgh, Scotland. They in turn took them to Christie's, the leading auctioneers in Britain, to be valued. *They* took them to an expert who said, yes, they're valuable because they were written by *Richard Horne*. You see, he'd "unraveled" the name.

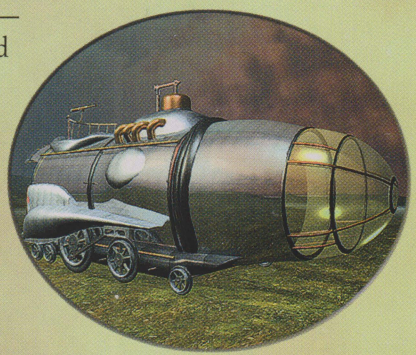
In fact, Richard Horne was an 18th century poet who wrote a book called *Orion* in 1846, *which was about a post-Flood Atlantis!* I didn't know *any* of this. He's not a major poet, but game that contains maybe 120 of my favorite books on the subjects—the best, written by people far better than I.

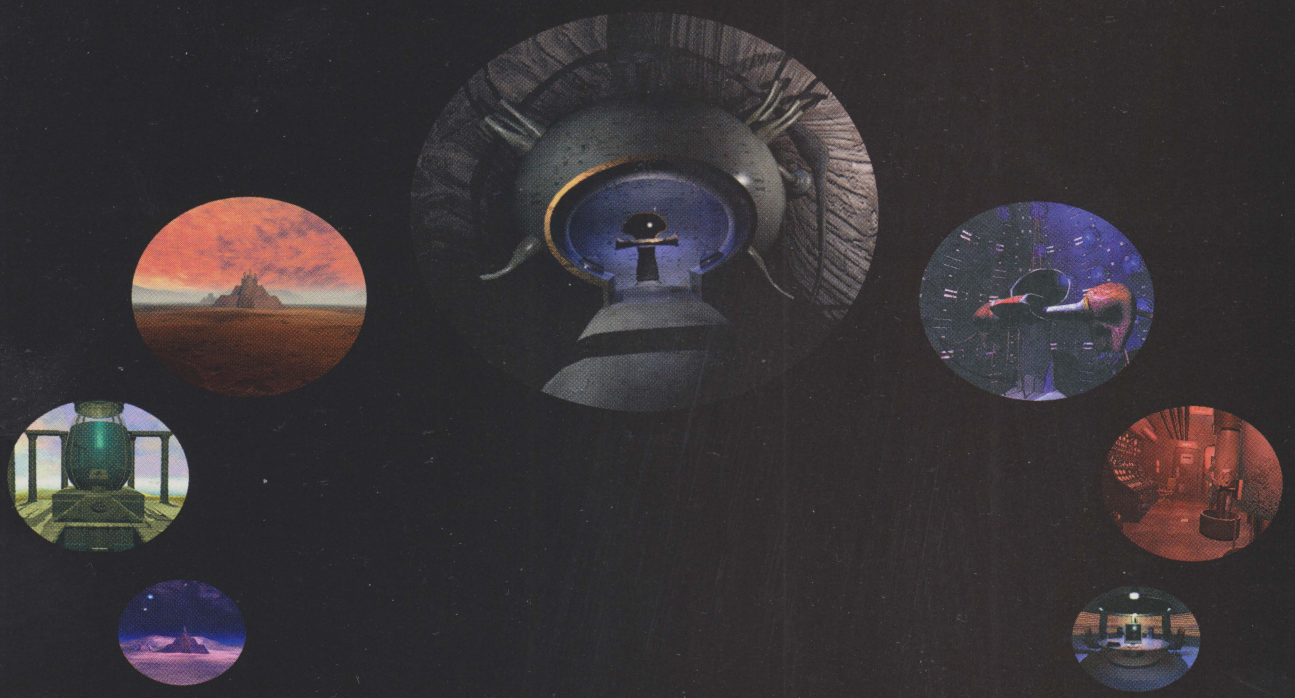
HOW TO MAKE AN ANTIQUE HOAX

M2: Aside from your ability to adopt a writing style and produce artwork, what actual, physical processes did you employ to fool trained antiquities brokers into buying these bogus tomes? I mean, that's *incredible*.

HH: First of all, I got typing paper with no water margin. I also got hold of some very *old* paper from a friend at an antique shop—basically the end-papers of sheet music books. I took ordinary household tea—up to twelve bags for a single session—poured water on them, immersed the paper into the tea solution, baked them in the oven, and then ironed them with a flatiron. Then I sprinkled little tiny bits of cooking oil on them. Then, after I'd written on them and sewn them up, I sprinkled tiny pieces of ash







from the fire onto the covers (I'm giving away all my secrets here, aren't I?) and finally I liberally sprinkled high-quality orange juice onto the covers. I then left the books in a cool, dark place to develop a culture, a mould.

It looked like the real McCoy! You can also do things like take mothballs and rub the books in them. When they get handed over to your prospective buyer, they *smell* authentic as well. These things have to have the right smell, a musty smell that comes from damp. You can arrange your own damp by wetting your book and leaving it on a concrete floor. When it dries out, it looks really, really old.

It was ritualistic for me. Each of the twelve books was sewn. The cotton that I used to sew them up was old waxed thread. It's very difficult to carbon-date paper, but there were certain test that experts can make, and I knew that they would test the ink, so I basically made my own sepia brown ink. There's a great film that I recommend to anyone who is interested in forgery, which is called *Stonk*. It's a true story about a forger who fakes the Adolph Hitler diaries. Remember, Hugh Trevor-Roper was taken in by the Hitler diaries that *Stern*, the German magazine, published? The thing about Trevor-Roper being duped was that the forged diaries were written on faint-lined paper in biro and...

M2: They weren't too big on biros in Hitler's day.

HH: No. But you see, it's the *willingness to believe* that dupes a lot of people. I would never forge another person's work. I'm capable of doing Rembrandt etchings, but I would never do it. There are enough fake Rembrandt etchings out there. What I did was not so much a *forgery*. I produced something that people wanted to believe was ancient.

THEM

Drowned God *is a playground for the paranoid, like this huge clockworks of large, unseen wheels turning. Harry Horse on paranoia, high-tech American style.*

HH: I recorded this talk show about aliens in L.A. one time. A woman got up in the middle of the show. She was very angry, and was trying to argue with the talk show host that the aliens were not here to subject us to terror, to harm us, but were here to help us. She spoke of them as if they were doctors. I was thrilled that I'd captured it on tape. I left the tape running, and continued to work on my laptop there in the room.

I had a whole load of stuff on that tape... Mexican radio stations, all these little snippets of commercials that I'd picked up. Everything was fine *until* you got to this talk show. The talk show, just the talk show, had

this weird *hum* over the top of it, all the voices distorted. We use it in the game. There's no way even on analog, let alone digitally, that we could have reproduced this sound; it's so *weird*. I never moved the tape recorder. It wasn't feeding back. It wasn't static either. Now either my tape machine buckled at that moment, coincidentally or— *[here Harry fumbles a bit, flustered]* —there are an awful, I mean, here we go out to left field. There are a lot of writers who claim that whenever you concentrate hard on The Greys, they *know* about it. It's the ultimate paranoid line: If I think about *Them*, then *They* are thinking about *me*. It... it gives me shivers up my spine.

M2: Now didn't you tell me earlier that at the points during which the woman was speaking, you began to hear something *else*?

HH: Yes. You'll hear it on the clips in the game. You hear something else *only* when the woman in question is heckling. It's difficult to make out what she says, but we've transcribed it. She says, "Don't you think they're here to help us? They're like doctors. They have feelings of kindness towards us." And there's *another voice*, which is also totally distorted... which is arguing in the contrary to this.

M2: You still have this tape? And the machine you recorded it on?

HH: The tape, yes.

I had been listening to the protesting woman, and to the other voice which seemed to overlap hers, and *only* hers. I stepped out of the room. There was a guy with a walkie-talkie. He was basically hotel security. And at moments like that you start to believe that something's afoot.

An acquaintance of mine, whom I met through Microsoft, said to me that we would never be able to make this game in the United States, citing that business where an American game producer was raided by—

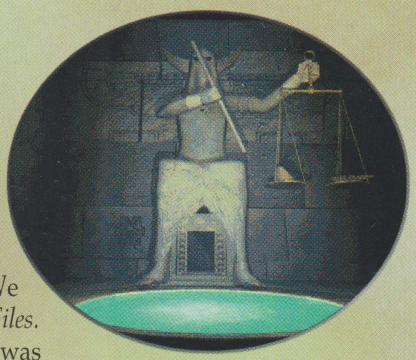
M2: Ah yes, Steve Jackson Games.

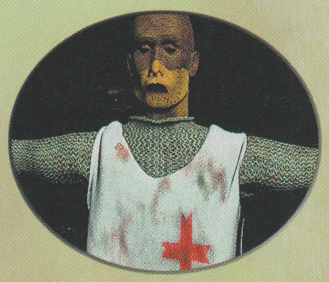
HH: Yes, exactly! In our game, there's the Hacker's Caravan. These characters sit in their trailer caravans outside Area 51 (This has actually been happening since the 70's). We go onto various databases: NSA, Majestic Twelve, Dreamland. When we originally pitched this game idea, there *was* no *X-Files*. We started six months before *The X-Files*. Our producer at the time said it was all too weird—UFOs, hackers in caravans—they just didn't think people would get it.

M2: High-fiber words indeed.

HH: Six months later, they were suddenly really happy. I mean, I can remember when you spoke about this subject, people would think you were an out-and-out nutcase. When I was a political cartoonist, I was tempted to put forward my theories on what was going on behind things like Desert Storm, and would have to be very careful with my editor talking about black ops. Which now more modern historians are taking as true. Money-laundering schemes... It's interesting when we talk about the game and start going into fact. How close and dangerous that can be, particularly with the current political stage. *[Harry Horse again becomes somewhat agitated, trying to pick his words with care.]* We're trying to handle something that is quite sensitive, and keep some of the truth intact. I think that, for instance, Inscape, the publishers, are very keen to have a hit with this, and yet... well, this is off the record now, but—

[At this point the taped interview begins to warble and finally cuts off completely, evidently the result of some mechanical flaw. Inscape representatives indicate that the remainder of the conversation largely centers on Chris Hudak and Harry Horse discussing the favorable prospects of the title's sales, and that the lost content is not of significant interest to the public at large.] M2



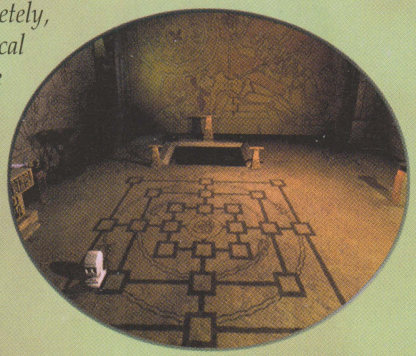


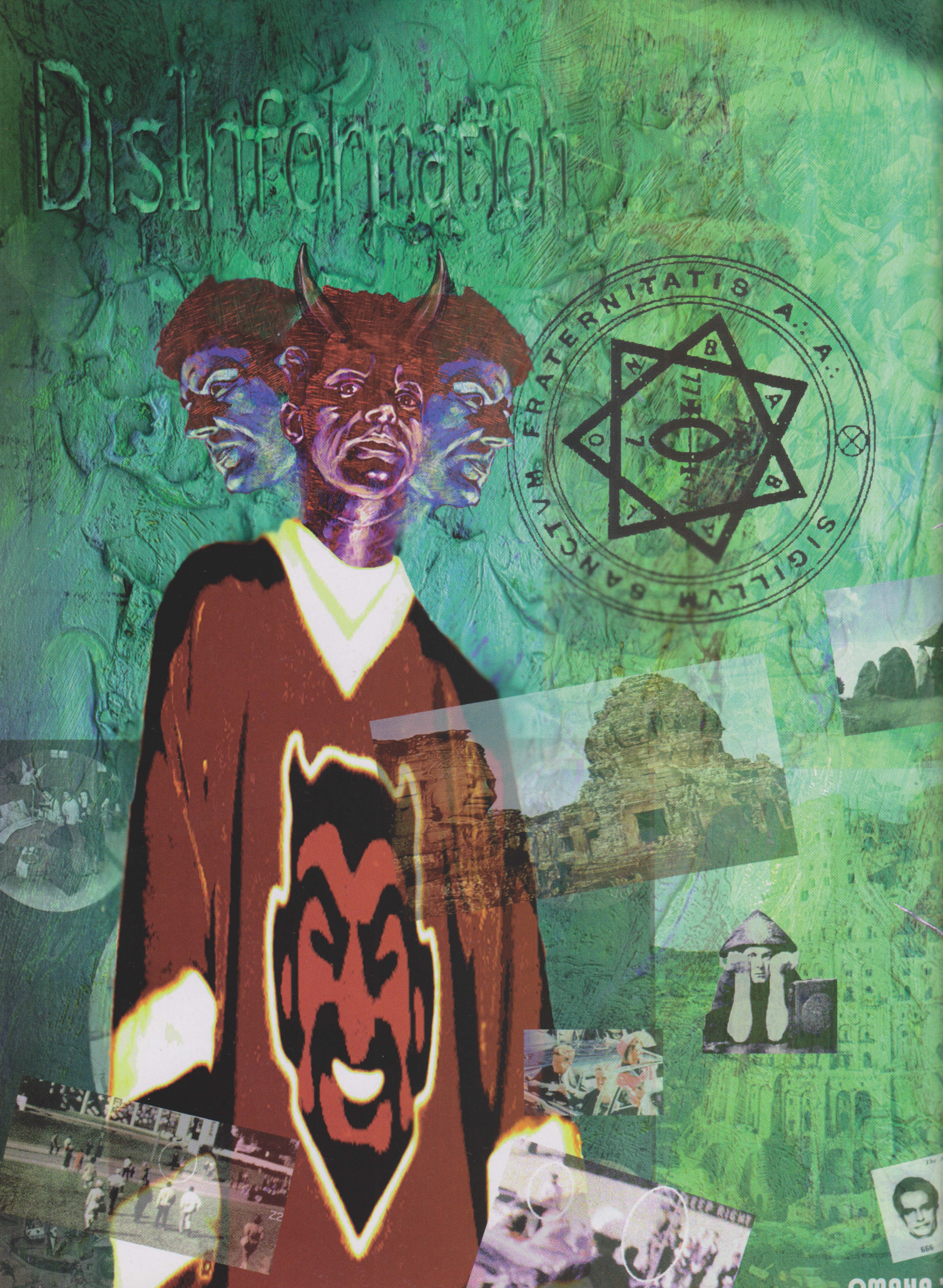


At moments like that you start to believe something's afoot







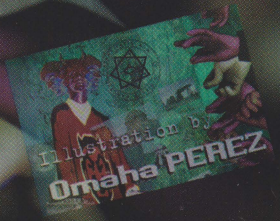

Disinformation
SIGILLVM SANCTVM FRATERNITATIS A.·.A.·.
666
OMAHA

the DisInformation REVOLUTION*

by R.U. Sirius

DisInformation sits there on the Netscape Search page, comfortably alongside Alta Vista, Yahoo! and Infoseek. Click in and you realize that you're on the main pipeline to Operation Mindfuck on the Web. Everything that's sort of gently implied by Yahoo! and by the kids working under the slightly suspicious parental eye of your various corporate-sponsored counterculture websites is blatantly right there on DisInformation: revolution, magick, conspiracies, counterintelligence and even darker eddies.

When DisInformation mainman Richard Metzger showed up on the Mondo doorstep more or less the same day that I returned from a three-year hiatus, I was merely annoyed. Damn, you can't get any fuckin' work done in this place. But once we locked eyes and started ranting about the thin weird lines between Crowley, Anger, Lennon, Leary, Jack Parsons, R.A. Wilson, LaVey—and the makers of other fine products—I knew that ol' black magick was in my blood again. The stars started spinning around and I noticed it was a full moon. Damn, it's great to be back at the Mondo house, where strange magick distracts.



[*Brought to You by TCI]

It's like a Rorschach blot of the collective political subconscious of the U.S.



R.U. Sirius: The style as well as the content of *DisInformation*, particularly the webzine segment, fairly screams of anarchy and subversion. How did you manage to get it onto the front page of Netscape?!!

Richard Metzger: I'm legally bound by the letter of my Faustian bargain *not* to reveal the nature of that solemn blood pact...

Seriously, we spent about a month working out the business plan for a webzine and concluded that there was no way that anyone in their right mind would invest in a webzine (especially one like *this*!) where the cash outlay would be about $70,000 a month and the potential for income about $45,000 at best (with about say three advertising banners). That's the economics of the WWW are at the moment. That's gonna change obviously as the Internet audience grows by a factor of nine over the next four years. I mean *HELLO*. But the trick is to establish your trademark in cyberspace *now* for when that payoff comes down the road with broadband, video on demand, television shows and print versions based on the Internet property... even complete cable networks. In 1998, when the dust has settled, the media chessboard will have been *drastically* redrawn reflecting the heavy Darwinian business climate in interactive media.

So anyway, we were in complete despair and our producer, Tom Spontelli asked "Well, what does make money on the web?" And we all looked over at him, rolled our eyes and answered (as a group, totally monotone) "Search engines." And he went "Exactly! Let's do this as a search engine." Then the proverbial light bulbs appeared over all of our heads like an old Maggie and Jiggs cartoon. It made perfect sense.

Being a search engine and getting on that Netscape NetSearch page was the key to "legitimizing" the business of *DisInformation*. By being right next to Hotbot, Yahoo! and Alta Vista, we had no trouble signing up an advertising firm. It's all a hat trick at the moment with Internet commerce. And the message that sends to potential sponsors is simply a strong signal that we know how to play the game and that we intend to make money. The kind of horse you'd want to bet on, considering how FAST the sands shift in this business space.

I want to cause trouble, *natch*, but I want to get filthy rich in the process... This *is* America, after all...

RU: I've just recently realized the degree to which the Net and Web represents a victory for counter- and sub-culturalism in this one sense: The generation currently in their teens won't even be able to recognize a consensus reality or know what the mainline politics of the moment allegedly is, because they won't even look at centralized media.

RM: Yeah, I totally agree with what you're saying. The consensus reality "message" is so confused and convoluted at this point that even the general public just eats static... and tunes it out. And then they start looking for alternate information sources. No one in Russia believes what they read in *Pravda*, and the U.S. media conglomerates are facing similar perception problems when everybody knows that GE owns NBC and Disney owns ABC, etc.

RU: So, how is *DisInformation* positioned to exploit this situation?

RM: The marketplace was begging for a *DisInformation*. From the beginning our goal was to reach the widest possible audience. Our hunch was that the same kind of stuff that *we* were interested in finding on the Web would be what other people were looking for too. *DisInformation* makes it easier to find conspiracy theory stuff, UFOs, "occulture"... you know, the weird shit. And we're using *that* as a candy coating for the bullet of the harder hitting, more subversive political things. Lure people in with an *X-Files* type storefront and get 'em hooked, then hit them with Noam Chomsky and Terence McKenna. Tee-hee...

After Oliver Stone's *JFK*, the term "conspiracy theory" entered the popular lexicon with such a vengeance. I *love* conspiracy theories because A) they're fun and B) they totally encourage skepticism and mistrust of the powers that be. That film, I think, was a major turning point in our culture. How could anyone *not* be affected by that message? It's like a Rorschach blot of the collective political subconscious of the U.S.

JFK pointed out an entirely unexploited niche in popular culture. It had been bubbling under for awhile, but *JFK* just smashed the door down. What could the establishment do against a guy like Oliver to shut *him* up? And, of course it made... what?... like $300 million?

And that's what we're trying to do. We're marketing controversy, like Malcolm McClaren's "Cash from Chaos" dictum. Information is like a drug, and we wanna be the Medellin Cartel of Operation Mindfuck.

RU: The name, *DisInformation*... do you believe that reality is up for grabs and objectivity impossible? Or are you "dis"-ing the information age? or...?

RM: I just love the irony of the name. The editorial stance is "Look critically at these issues. Learn to read between the lines of the mass media and understand how you're being manipulated, how the issue is being framed for you, how you're being lied to and brainwashed to be a well-behaved consumer." FIGURE IT OUT!

But the funny thing—funny to me at least—is why should *anybody* trust *me* for fuck's sake?!?!?!?!? Who am I, right? We get *tons* of e-mail asking "What if your site is just a better designed, more sophisticated disinformation device?" I love those letters because they indicate that people sorta get the joke, but I feel like asking "Yeah, and your point is?" By calling the site *DisInformation*, I feel like I'm being upfront at the door, you know? I am deeply cynical about all of this shit!

I'm *sure* that by the time this issue reaches the stands *everybody* will know which multi-national media oligarchy financed this puppy [*TCI*] and that'll just add fuel to that fire, bigtime. I think it'll be hilarious. It'll seem like a publicity stunt, like it was planned. But they never even *looked* at the content before it went live! They *glanced* at the art, said "Oh great, it looks like MTV" and moved on! We kept the subversive stuff under wraps until the day it launched and walked on eggshells for weeks hoping that the suits wouldn't ask for the URL.

RU: So, are you guys the Illuminati?

RM: We get accused of it at least once a day. Our political editor, Leila Conners is on the Council on Foreign Relations. It says so right on the credits page! I'll tell you what. If the Illuminati head hunters come looking to recruit *me* and the money's right, um... I'm fuckin' *there*, dude...

RU: Me too! What are your own particular interests? The occult? Politics? Conspiracy theory? Sex? Food? Wax candies?

RM: The occult for sure. I'm obsessed by Aleister Crowley and Timothy Leary. Hopefully Leary's 70's books will be reprinted and rediscovered soon. They're mind blowing. The secrets of magick all laid out on a silver platter, *if* you know what you're looking for.

The 70's Leary books borrow heavily from Crowley. They're almost direct rip-offs in a way. Reading Uncle Al is like reading James Joyce, hard work, but the payoff is astonishing. Leary made Crowley user friendly, and the parallels between their lives are striking. Leary even thought he was the reincarnation of Crowley, although I don't know how that could be possible as they were both alive at the same time. The correlations between *The Book of the Law* and *The Starseed Transmissions* that Robert Anton Wilson pointed out in *Cosmic Trigger* really should be examined more closely by the conspiracy theory set. There's something there, for sure. I was surprised that none of Leary's friends pointed out that comet appearing out of nowhere just before his death in any of the obituaries. I found it *quite* significant.

I like Terence McKenna's work. He's very wise and he's going to become a *major* figure in this culture as things start getting more out of control. People are gonna start listening to him. How closely does his "Experiment in La Chorerra" which led to the Timewave Zero theory resemble Crowley's reception of *The Book of the Law* in Cairo, or the delivery of the Enochian language to Dr. John Dee and Edward Kelley in Elizabethan England? Or the burning bush of Moses? Rene Descartes and the Angel? The "Babalon Working" of Jack Parsons and, of course, the Starseed Transmissions of Dr. Timothy Leary? Occult history. I'm fascinated by all that stuff.

RU: Do you practice magick?

RM: I have a very magickal view of the universe and yes, I would definitely describe myself as a warlock. I look for signs, correspondences and the manifestation of synchronicity everywhere. The universe speaks to me in that way, often with a sense of humor. It isn't subtle at all. Little cosmic winks or telegrams. It would be hard to explain it in a way that didn't make me sound like a nutcase.

To me, the Internet is a place where I can work magick, whether it's being able to pluck just the right piece of information out of cyberspace using Alta Vista or using e-mail to slide love letters every morning under the front door of a beautiful woman living with her boyfriend. It's a far more effective play than, you know, waving a magic wand around or something like that! If you're creative the possibilities are *vast* and if you think about the way it works, describing the Internet using magical metaphors is absolutely appropriate. Who needs astral travel? "Magick is the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will," as Uncle Al said. You can influence things in *so many* different ways on the WWW. Consensus reality is much more mutable than ever before. It's like that "Flight 800, Was it Friendly Fire?" e-mail story: Make up a rumor (i.e., cast a spell), spread it around... That got to the front page of *The New York Times!* Are you thinking what I'm thinking? It's like a Burroughs novel, "Somewhere the Wild Boys smiled." It's a real opportunity to smash the door down on the reality engineers of the corporate media.

With *DisInformation*, all I do is *juxtapose* various issues against others and invite people to draw their own conclusions. Hopefully the bulb goes on or the apple crashes down on their heads. That's a "magickal" use of the technology to blow people's minds. *DisInformation* is my little spell, my alchemical formula to rip a hole in the fabric of reality.

RU: What's your favorite conspiracy theory?

RM: There's not one in particular. I've been following the conspiracy world going from the JFK assassination and George Bush to Jack Parsons and Terence McKenna via a sharp turn at Wilhelm Reich... Conspiracy theorists and occultists seem to be seeing pretty eye to eye these days. And psychedelic people. The rave crowd. It all seems to be becoming the *same* bandwagon. People are sniffing something weird in the air the same way animals sense an impending earthquake. People who can tell the shit is about to hit the fucking fan. M2

DisInformation: www.disinfo.com



ILLUSTRATION BY TIM HUSSEY

It's Allright Maw.

I'M ONLY BLEEDING

The connection between

the CIA and psychedelic drugs

has exerted a grim fascination on psychenauts and conspiracy buffs alike.

Most historians, following Martin Lee (author of the 1988 book, *Acid Dreams: LSD, the CIA and the Sixties*), have accepted the notion of two separate trajectories. On the one hand, the Feds explored LSD for warfare and mind control. On the other hand, a strange mix of humanist psychologists, bohos, mystics, and radicals used it to liberate the mind from the dominant cultural program.

This narrative is a bit suspect though. Between the two camps, it was more of a semi-permeable membrane. We know that Ken Kesey, Robert Hunter, Abbie Hoffman and many other psychedelic bliss barkers were all turned on by government-sponsored programs. And we know that Al Hubbard, a sort of rightwing adventurer with acknowledged government connections, was a veritable Johnny Acidseed in the mid-60's, spreading the drug hither and yon while gobbling vast quantities and getting ever stranger. Come to think of it, the CIA tried some weird, fantastic, surrealistic shit in those days—much of it directed at Fidel Castro. And we know that many agents were forced to drop acid in preparatory hazing rituals while Burma provided the cash crop for the CIA.

So I prefer to think of it as an appropriately mind-twisted blur, a strange mix of freaks from beyond the pale of the ordinary bourgeois civic delusion—agents and bohos, radicals and scoundrels, all—sometimes unwittingly—carrying the psychedelic meme forward together, each believing it was on behalf of their own peculiar purpose. And in the end, there's only wisdom's maw.

First time novelist Todd Fahey has been courageous and crazy enough to offer up a work of speculative fiction. What if the CIA had intentionally created the counterculture? What if Ken Kesey was a useful idiot? What if Aldous Huxley and President Kennedy rubbed tweedy shoulders at an acid party on the Potomac? What if it's richer and stranger than any of us ever thought?

An Interview with Wisdom's Maw author, Todd Fahey

BY R. U. SIRIUS

R.U. Sirius: In your book, the CIA consciously sets out tc create an LSD culture. And then, it gets too wild, too uncontrolled, and they set about killing it. How'd you dive into this maw, and how much of it do you believe?
Todd Fahey: Well, I read the two popular books on the history of the psychedelic movement, *Acid Dreams* and *Storming Heaven*. That's where it started. The character of Al Hubbard really seized me. Just took me over in every way. I was consumed by the whole acid history: the Players, the rivalries, Leary vs. Kesey, the Government vs. Leary, Kesey's experiments at Stanford. Everything. Obsessed.

So I put together the hypothesis that the CIA "created" what we now know as "the 60's"—as James Kent said in his *High Times* review "to backburn the youth movement." Now, the CIA and FBI were both involved in MK-ULTRA, the secret program to test LSD and other compounds for their incapacitory and brainwashing potentials. The FBI had the very twisted Operation Midnight Climax, dosing high-level johns with acid, and videotaping them in flagrante delicto from behind a two-way mirror in hotels in New York and San Francisco. It seems that even Hoover may not have known about this. It was a very renegade project, headed by George Hunter White, an extraordinarily depraved and evil man.

Anyway, the CIA and FBI are looking at the political youth movement. They know it's getting noisy in San Francisco and decide: "Hey, we have this drug available to us that may allow us to control some of the leaders of this youth rebellion." A-ha. They may or may not have planned on Kesey smuggling out a bunch of Delysid, turning on his very intelligent and active friends at Perry Lane and La Honda. Or that a guy like Owsley would unlock the molecular secret and begin synthesizing it on the streets.

In the book, I presume that Al Hubbard knew precisely what he was doing and wanted it on the streets. Hubbard was sort of a revolutionary messiah when it came to turning folks on to the pleasures of LSD, psylocibin, and mescaline. He was a fanatic. In my *High Times* article ("The Original Captain Trips," November 1991), I quoted Dr. Abram Hoffer saying, "Al had a grandiose idea, that if he could turn on the CEOs of the Fortune 500 companies, he could change the whole of society." And, of course, it might have.

I've been told by several of Hubbard's associates that, in the course of writing the High Times article, I captured him more accurately than any journalist ever had previously. Closer than *Storming Heaven* or *Acid Dreams*. Why I was allowed access to some of the stuff I saw, I'll never know. I currently have in my possession Hubbard's original typescript resumes, photos no one has ever seen of Hubbard with Huxley and Gerald Heard—they were developed from thirty-year old unexposed negatives while I was writing that story.

From the behavior of some of the people I corresponded with and spoke to (and I talked with a shitload of people; Humphrey Osmond, Laura Huxley, Leary, Abram Hoffer), it appears that someone wanted Hubbard's story told. I have probably 40 hours of audio tapes from phone conversations about Hubbard. Humphrey Osmond was a tremendous resource. Once we'd talked and developed a really fine rapport, he gave me a list of people to talk with. Most of them were just extraordinarily willing to talk. I was put in touch with Hubbard's wife. She was still alive, living in a trailer somewhere near San Bernardino. She told me: "I do not speak of my late husband. There's a man who handles all questions relative to Al. I'll tell him of your interest, and if he thinks it's in the best interest of Al's memory, he'll get in touch with you." A week later, I got a call , and this man absolutely grilled me for about thirty minutes. He asked about my experiences, what I knew about Hubbard to date. I told him I was doing the story for my master's thesis at USC—which was partially true. Originally, *Wisdom's Maw* was going to be my thesis. I guess I passed the test, because I was asked to his house, and told that I could view everything he had on Hubbard, I could take no pictures, he'd do all the photocopying, and we'd put all discussion on tape—his machine and mine.

I'm flat-out positive that Hubbard was CIA. The kind of access he had to Sandoz, to the Army, to Senators, State Attorney Generals... he *had* to have been CIA. His resume states that he was at various times employed by the Department of Treasury and Canadian Special Services (note: Hubbard moved to British Columbia in the early 1950's, reportedly to escape federal indictment for violations of maritime laws during WWII, and shortly thereafter was naturalized as a Canadian citizen). No mention of the CIA. Now, in part of my research for *Wisdom's Maw*, I successfully got MK-ULTRA records from the CIA, using the Freedom Of Information Act. I specifically requested any material on "Alfred M. Hubbard." The Information Directorate claimed no knowledge of "one Alfred M. Hubbard"; that it had no file on him. I mean, come on. Here's a world travelling, well connected guy who was busted in Switzerland for selling LSD worldwide from a maildrop in the Zurich airport, who openly procured a gram of LSD from the Czech pharmaceutical giant, Spofa. They had to have had a file on Hubbard. Well, it's offical routine that the Company denies all knowledge of its agents.

The man was a genuine connoisseur of psychedelics. He had a tooth for it.

Some stories told to me by Myron Stolaroff indicated that Hubbard was very sincerely a mystic, a shaman, a seer. He was a soul on fire. I'd love to write his biography, but I don't think any

of his associates would get near me again. All doors shut on me after the *High Times* article. In fact, things got scary for me. It was generally known that my phones were not to be trusted. (I remember my literary agent laughing out loud one day: "God damn, your line is lousy! They've got you bugged from here to gone!") A particular gentleman demanded that I return all material given to me about Hubbard during the research for my "thesis." I was getting threatening phone calls and registered mail at my office in LA. So, one day, my wife and I packed up and fucking fled to Salt Lake City. I figured, they'd really have to want me bad to follow me to Utah.

Anyway, Hubbard crashed and burned around the mid-60's. He burned a lot of bridges, made a lot of enemies, and was pretty well embittered about the future of LSD by the time the whole hippie thing happened. And, as an arch-conservative and spy, he was totally philosophically opposed to Leary. Dr. Humphrey Osmond (the man who turned Huxley on to mescaline, for *The Doors of Perception*) told me that Hubbard became obsessed at one point with the idea of shooting Leary—killing him. And when Osmond reasoned with Hubbard that it was a very bad idea, Osmond became fearful that Hubbard would kill him. No joke. I've got this on tape.

RU: What about weirder-still conspiracies? In researching the association between the CIA and LSD, did you come across anything that made you think of a broader conspiracy? The Illuminati? Occult brotherhoods? Neo fascists? New World Order?

TF: Well, I'm familiar with Robert Anton Wilson's books, and he's speculated about a Nazi/psychedelic connection, which probably had roots in Hitler's fascination with the occult. Some guy in New York, who I believe is a LaRouchie, sent me many e-mail messages pushing the idea that Michael Hollingshead (the man who gave LSD to Leary and most of the 60's British pop stars) and Aldous Huxley were agents for the British MI-6. That might have made a nice dramatical tie-in for the book, but I'd already completed the novel by the time he was innundating me with that.

RU: *Wisdom's Maw* theorizes that the CIA introduced psychedelic drugs to slow down a radical youth political movement. Yet you show an understanding of the tremendous value in psychedelic experience. So, according to the *Maw* worldview, was it just an accident of history that people at least got to have a valuable existential or ecstatic experience in exchange for their political potency?

TF: Early on, I don't think the Government (i.e., Intelligence, the Army Chemical Corps, et al.) factored in the ability of psychedelics to bring stable minds to the ecstatic state—or, "the visionary experience," as it's referred to by Huxley on down. What the Lab Madness Boys—the Skinnerian Behaviorists who were in charge of the medical testing end of MK-ULTRA had in mind, what Leo Hollister at Menlo Park Veterans Hospital had in mind was an agent of social control, period. Incidentally, it's been demonstrated now that Canada held its own particularly sadistic version of MK-ULTRA. I've had e-mail and been sent hardcopy medical reports from certain victims of mind-control at one of the psychiatric jails up in Saskatchewan. Horrendous stuff—sleep deprivation; forcing prisoners to live in their own urine and filth while being subjected to constant high-output lights, repetetive, high-decibel noise/music through headphones while straight-jacketed.

Anyway, no... I don't think the Skinnerian types anticipated that the more brilliant of the experimentees—Kesey especially—would to be able to handle this substance in spades. Kesey and Leary in particular did an incalculable service to trippers since '64. The Bus, the whole Dadaist idea of fun—accepting total chaos without associated anxiety—is something the MK-ULTRA spooks could never have dreamed of. And it ruined their plans.

RU: Well, the weirder aspect of your book has CIA man Bill Casey (Bill Creasy in the book) gobbling acid with Hubbard and Aldous Huxley. Huxley is posited as a kind of philosopher emeritus for a plan to create a race of evolved psychedelic supermen. And Kesey is both the useful idiot and the experimental guinea pig cum psychedelic superman. I suppose that some of Huxley's writings about Moksha could be twisted to that interpretation.

TF: As for Aldous Huxley and his tie-in to MK-ULTRA in *Wisdom's Maw*, this was entirely a flight of fancy on my part. It's well-known that Huxley was obstinately elitist. He was no fan of the proletariat having access to LSD and felt that only those of his superior intellectual caliber (was there anyone alive as bright as Huxley?) should be treated to the visionary experience by chemical means.

Now, as I've said, I've heard stories of Huxley having had ties to the British MI-6. I believe Lyndon LaRouche wrote of this in *Dope, Inc.*, for whatever that's worth. But I brought Huxley in largely through logical extrapolation. I was really pained over my treatment of him in *Wisdom's Maw*, actually. But lately people have been saying, "No, I think you might have nailed it." Who the hell knows?

RU: Well, it's an independent book that's getting a lot of attention. More power to you!

TF: Yes, I self-published it. The New York media elite and several notable small presses panicked, said the book was libelous. They thought that Kesey would sue my ass and that the book would never sell enough to make back court costs. Well, fuck them. It's selling. It's getting great reviews. I'm having a great time pushing it over the Internet and I hope it makes me rich. M2

"The pivotal election year of 2004 will determine more than the next president of the United States. Violent crime continues to be the number one political issue in America. For many citizens a vote for Senator Travis Hall is also a vote for his controversial 'Swift and Sure Anti-Crime Bill,' a measure that guarantees a previously convicted criminal one fair trial, one quick appeal, then immediate execution. Voters overwhelmingly support the idea, surrendering individual rights and due process of law with a resounding *yes* for capital punishment." — *The Truth Machine* jacket blurb

TRUTH AND CONSEQUENCES

BY WILL LOHAUS

Cinderella story meets Brave New World in New York publishing house; makes out, gets down, swells up. Author self-publishes first novel, does market research, puts it up on the Web, then goes on vacation. Mid-July: The Call. "This is Ballantine, one of our in-house authors loved your book. We all love your book. We want to buy your book. We want it to lead our fall line up, due out in two weeks. Come to New York." By September 12 the book is reissued in a PR explosion: THIS IS THE FUTURE. YOU WILL LIVE THIS. PREPARE. A categorical edict that brooks no dissent. Copies are delivered to the Republican National Convention in San Diego: "Privacy indulges secrecy, and it is secrecy that now most imperils our survival. Refusal to submit to the Truth Machine will brand a politician unelectable."

ARTWORK DAVID ZARICK

James Halperin denies that he is the nephew of Morton Halperin, head of the IMF. What we *do* know about him is this: He attended Harvard, moved to Dallas and started the world's largest rare coin business.



Obsessed and intrigued by the possibilities of a foolproof lie detector, he researched it, realized he couldn't build it, decided on a novel about it instead. Premise: What would happen if all transactions were flawlessly truth-checked? Encouraged by friends, abetted by hired quill Jennifer Miller, Halperin birthed the book in Grishamesque prose, got a national polling organization to do market research, then posted it to the Web. The Catch: To access the text, you complete a probing questionnaire, comfortable as a sigmoid, deep throat "market research" with fish hooks: Would you submit to the Truth Machine? Do you personally wish there *were* a Truth Machine?

Well-intentioned output of a basically elitist mushhead? Teasing French tickler of the New World Order? Or something even more sinister? We have not seen the last of *The Truth Machine*. A scant month after publication saw it optioned to Warner Brothers' Bruce Berman, production manager of the last few *Batman* movies, the *Lethal Weapon* series, the Grisham derivatives. And James himself is reportedly holed up in his counting house, cooking up the prequel.

Mondo 2000: What threw you into this?

James Halperin: I kind of live in the future. My mind is always thinking about what's coming next. One day I started thinking about our justice system and the way humans interact with each other, and I thought, you know, if we had a foolproof lie detector it would change *everything*. It would be the most important invention in history. So I started talking to people about it—I have a lot of really smart friends; some of them are in neuroscience and fields like that—and the consensus was that it would be very hard to develop. So I thought, maybe it's too ambitious a project to undertake, so maybe I'll just write a novel about it. So I researched it for a couple years.

M2: In your research did you run into the Russian psychologist Smirnoff, who is brought in to do both lie detector and subliminal work?

JH: No, I didn't...

M2: What Smirnoff does... Do you know much about the technology of neural scanning?

JH: A lot more than I did a couple years ago.

M2: Smirnoff found out he could change brain wave patterns with either subliminals or with ELF waves...

JH: Alpha waves?

M2: ELF waves: extra low frequency waves. Like radio broadcasts but they can be used to entrain people's brainwave function. He was able to change lie detector results and change brainwave scan results. This seems relevant.

JH: This book is probably more simplistic than real life, you know, because novels have to be. But it seems to me, and this is an ad lib, of course, if technology like that exists, technology to detect it also exists.

M2: So much seems to depend on the application, on who is applying the technology.

JH: I talked about violent crime in there, how violent criminals are like mosquitoes, how they're always adapting and we're always coming up with new pesticides. In real life a Truth Machine would be a lot more like that. Here you'd have the most profitable product in the world and an awful lot of money behind it keeping it ahead of the bad guys.

M2: One concern is how do we let technology integrate into our institutions? As with the rehab test in the book, pre-Truth Machine, once the hardware is in place, institutions can't afford *not* to use it. Where do we draw the line on technology making moralistic decisions?

JH: I think we never draw the line on it. It's just a matter of becoming ready for it. There's a certain curve. Imagine in the 50's if someone had told you they were going to take a heart from a living person and transplant it into another living person, so that second person could survive. I would have said "that's Frankenstein stuff. We can't ever let this happen." But then all of a sudden it happens, and it becomes a paradigm of society and it's perfectly acceptable now. Organ transplants now are commonplace.

M2: And organ theft.

JH: Yeah. People's attitudes just change, and that's what has to happen. Society is never going to be perfect; there will always be things wrong with it, but hopefully we'll grope our way toward reducing the imperfections, and that will take a certain amount of adjustment on everybody's part.

M2: I stumbled in the first few chapters on the figures presented as actual contemporary data: $80,000 as the average U.S. family income in 1995. Where are our operative assumptions about the nature of reality, and where are we missing our own assumptions? Like that prison sentences reduce recidivism?

JH: It doesn't. I hit that in the book. With that income figure, we'd have to find it.

M2: Or violent crime.

JH: A violent criminal commits an average of two hundred crimes a year. Put one of those suckers away for ten years and you've prevented two thousand violent crimes.

M2: Really? The book cites the figure of an average of a crime a week.

JH: That's for sex offenders. That's probably low, I don't know.

M2: Where are those figures from? They seem incredibly high.

JH: I don't know off the top of my head, but I *did* research it very carefully, everything in that book, and sent it off to experts in

various fields and got their feedback. I'm really very confident about most of the hard facts in there.

"The ACIP had already rendered moot the right to avoid self-incrimination as guaranteed under the Fifth Amendment of the Constitution. I won't go into the political mess that created at the time; suffice it to say it was an emotional, historically divisive issue. Americans still had the right not to testify against themselves in court, but so what? Most licensing applications were now administered under scip. In order to receive licenses to operate machinery, carry firearms, visit other countries, or receive many other privileges, applicants were legally required to confess any crimes committed after April 30, 2006, the date the Truth Machine Bill was enacted. It was becoming virtually impossible to exist in American society without confessing all."

—The Truth Machine

M2: So truth is more productive?
JH: There are trade-offs. Once there's a Truth Machine, everyone has to be honest. If you don't have to be honest, you won't be, because it's genetically programmed in us to deceive.
M2: Really?
JH: The ability to deceive has been an important boost to one's ability to survive. Those who were the best deceivers lived and procreated. In war those who deceived the enemies won the wars, invariably.
M2: On a macro level—but on a micro level, for individuals?
JH: On a micro level it doesn't matter. Sure, there are exceptions, but certainly what happens on a macro level drives evolution.
M2: So how is the lived experience of the individual reflective of this? How do we experience this deception?
JH: We don't. If a race is better at deceiving its enemies than vice versa, it will tend to win wars, kill the men, steal the women [*laughing*], and plant their seed. This has probably been true for hundreds of thousands or maybe millions of years. It may have been true of the apes. We have a genetic bias towards deceit when we think it's towards our advantage.
M2: What about the Swiss? A democracy without war since 1300 more or less?
JH: You can't talk about evolution over six hundred years. We're talking millennia.
M2: Have you read much history of aboriginal peoples?
JH: A little.
M2: The whole warfare schema as organizing principle doesn't seem to hold up.
JH: Warfare is only one aspect of it: The ability to deceive one's prey is another aspect of survival. It's a very complicated system we all inhabit. All I'm saying is that it is natural to deceive, and we all do it. Individually it benefits us to be able to deceive, yet collectively it harms us. The Truth Machine disallows people acting in their individual best interests to the detriment of the species. Anarchy is our natural state and we *moderate* it, control it. Quite rightly I believe.
M2: Yet conceiving a world in which all of our transactions are truth checked—how does that sit?
JH: It would take some getting used to. There are situations in which it is worth being honest yourself in order to make sure everyone else has to be honest, like getting on a plane, being checked for bombs. Perhaps there are situations in which it isn't worth it. Now if you're the only one, if you're Winston Smith, and Big Brother is looking at you, and you don't know who Big Brother is, that's a whole lot worse than the society depicted in *The Truth Machine* where everybody knows who is watching them and everyone has the exact same access to information. I think that society has a responsibility to protect its members. It doesn't always do a great job of that, but I think it does a better job than it ever has in history. But it's still not good enough. I personally believe it will get better. I think the Truth Machine represents the ultimate tool to make the problem easier to solve.
M2: The problem being?
JH: The problem of society protecting its members from one another.
M2: Have you ever spent time with a violent criminal?
JH: Yes.
M2: Tell me about it.
JH: I didn't know he was a violent criminal, but he was, he is. He's in jail now. You can't tell. I couldn't tell. I knew him pretty well; spent quite a bit of time with him, shared meals with him. He was in the coin business and I'd done a lot of business with him. I knew him quite well. I liked him.
M2: Is there a lot of deception in the coin business?
JH: I think there is in most business.
M2: So you spent time with him and you couldn't tell?
JH: There was no way to tell.
M2: Was his behavior in any way different than other people you have lunch with?
JH: No. I didn't think so.
M2: And one day in the papers you found out.
JH: Pretty much.
M2: And did he go to trial?
JH: I believe there was a plea bargain.
M2: So for all you know he could have been framed and accepted a plea bargain?
JH: I don't think there's any way.
M2: Because?
JH: I don't think that would have happened. The evidence was overwhelming. There really didn't seem to be any question.
M2: That seems to read as a sticky question: If we can't tell the criminals around us from ourselves, or from our friends, how can we be sure? How can we be sure that any evidence, even biological evidence is actual?
JH: We do the best we can. Now we have something we call due process. I

think we can do better, with the help of technology.

M2: This whole surveillance thing...

JH: That's gonna happen anyway.

M2: How do you see that happening?

JH: People are gonna wear cameras on their watches, and they're gonna store the images off-site, and you're not gonna know if they're running or not. That's ten years from now at the most. There'll be cameras everywhere. They'll be cheap, they'll be tiny, they'll be able to store information off-site at practically no cost. The economics will drive it.

M2: The same question of doctoring lab results comes up with doctoring video imagery. During the Gulf War NBC admitted to staging video footage of a Scud attack.

JH: I address that in the book. It'll be documented by government time dating facilities so we'll know exactly when the image was produced. Because it is a real problem, and it will have to be addressed. Penn Jillette of Penn and Teller told me he thought that by early in the 21st century there would be no more forensic evidence because it could all be manufactured. I disagree with that because there would be ways of verifying the time evidence was recorded.

M2: Off-site?

JH: Off-site. There will be companies or perhaps government agencies whose sole function will be to authenticate evidence based on when they received it.

M2: You know about polygon sampling technology; how it is possible to sample our biolandscape and mix it in with media imagery? We are able to bitmap people's bodies, animate them, and place them in other scenes.

JH: Obviously this time-dating would also be placed, would also confirm where imagery was recorded.

M2: In a neutral site?

JH: In a neutral site... one that would be incorruptible.

M2: Do you see government as facilitating that?

JH: I don't think it matters. I think private industry could do it just fine, as long as it was above suspicion.

M2: How could it be above suspicion?

JH: It would have to have such a valuable franchise that it wouldn't do anything to lose it. Its impeccability is its marketability.

M2: Do you know anyone developing this hardware now?

JH: No. But it'll happen. It can't *not* happen. It would be far too big a market to go untapped.

M2: Security? Personal security? Business security? Applications aplenty?

JH: Plenty. Those applications and others we can't even imagine.

JAMES L. HALPERIN



I USE THE WORD TRUTH BECAUSE IT'S A GREAT TITLE. THE MACHINE ITSELF IS A DECEIT DETECTOR, AND IT'S NOT REALLY A TRUTH MACHINE. YOU CAN'T HAVE A TRUTH MACHINE, IT'S TOO COMPLEX.

The truth is very valuable and that will become more and more obvious over time.

M2: And how the truth is framed?

JH: That will become less important. It will become more objective. That will become the great industry of the 21st century: objectifying truth.

"For over a month he dedicated every important fact and theory he could think of, every nuance of evaluating prisoners for criminal potential. Knowing the software would automatically test his theories and eventually reject any unsound ones, he postulated, 'It seems to me that emotional intelligence is the most important aspect to measure. Most violent crimes are unplanned, stemming from underdeveloped impulse control and lack of self-restraint. A person who understands his or her own feelings can deal with them more successfully and thus refrain from future violence.'"

—The Truth Machine

M2: What about what we're perceiving that we're not aware we're perceiving? What about the subliminal? Our eyes recognize ten billion bits per second, and there's a long history of putting masked images and semi-images into media whose iconography produces a consistent response—subjective contour illusions?

JH: I'm not an expert on that stuff.

M2: If we're only recognizing a fraction of the feedback of the five senses, and are only programming machines to recognize what we recognize, how does this sort of stuff get filtered out?

JH: It doesn't, but that's not the purpose of the Truth Machine. The purpose of the Truth Machine is to detect deceit. I use the word truth because it's a great title. The machine itself is a deceit detector, and it's not really a Truth Machine. You can't have a Truth Machine, it's too complex.

M2: So we have a perception of lying machine.

JH: Yes. The Truth Machine filters out the deceit that makes the truth so much harder to know. The machine forces deceit out of interactions, thus making them infinitely more truthful, but not guaranteeing truthfulness.

M2: Not guaranteeing objectivity, just subjective truthfulness.

JH: Exactly.

M2: Are you familiar with this thing called "rapport" as used by the military, by psychological warfare units? Rapport is established when a viewer or perceiver of information perceives that the purveyor of that information is telling the truth.

JH: I didn't know that.

M2: So the best people for disseminating propaganda are those people who are either unable to discriminate about its veracity, or those who actually believe it.

JH: That makes sense. I believe that.

M2: If we are dealing with one another, who believes we are telling the truth, how can the person behind the scenes, who is feeding, get caught?

JH: I deal with that in the book. Congress is a perfect example of that. Lobbyists going into Congress telling them that yes, this legislation is good for the environment, or good for their constituents. The lobbyists themselves may or may not believe what they are telling the congressman or the senator, but the companies themselves, you can be sure they know both sides of the story, and present one. It would be an easy piece of legislation to pass, if we had a Truth Machine, requiring companies to divulge both sides of the story to their lobbyists, and the lobbyists to divulge both sides to their legislators. It's not a perfect solution, but it's a hell of a lot better than what we have now. And it would make a huge, huge difference in the ways our laws were constructed.

M2: Do you know of a psychologist named Leon Festinger? His great discovery: the primary problem of social scientific and scientific research alike is what he calls "cognitive dissonance reduction".

JH: Cognitive dissonance reduction?

M2: Discarding information contradictory to the premises of our search, disregarding data other than that included in our searchstrings. Joe goes into the forest looking for triangles. Ten thousand circles, all around him. Dilligently searching for triangles. he gets out the other side, and Betty, his superior, says: Joe, what did you see? Nothing. Did you see any triangles? No. Any squares? No. Any circles? No. Adding the necessity of subjective truth to our interactions seems an excellent first step.

JH: That's all it is.

M2: Can you conceive an algorithm which could police us for our assumptions and for our searchstrings?

JH: No, I can't. Maybe with artificial intelligence some time in the future. A human brain is infinitely more complex than any computer on earth right now, and unpredictable, far more so than any computer. But consider: A transistor in our most intricate computers is now about half a trillion atoms. What happens when they're five atoms? We'll be able to have computers as complex as human brains, a million times as fast, and totally predictable. I don't think they'll get us all the way there, to enlightenment, there's just too much to know, but they'll get us closer. If we don't let them become sentient.

"The ATI Truth Machine team kept hitting the same brick wall. Now called the Armstrong Cerebral Image Processor (ACIP), the Truth Machine had been refined to 98-percent accuracy, using only a combination of physiologically enhanced MRI and cerebral image reconstruction. Both MRI and CIR had become inexpensive machines, no longer under patent protection, and easy to build into the ACIP prototype units that were about the size of a large chair or a very small desk.

Unfortunately, a small percentage of the field test subjects had been able to induce in themselves a dissociative state in which they believed their own lies."

—The Truth Machine

JH: I'm a great believer in knowledge, in the value of knowledge.

M2: An example being?

JH: It's the same reason I believe in the truth. Any time you can filter out bad knowledge, you should do it.

M2: Could it be that in our search for more data we have learned to ignore the knowledge of the past, as embodied by societies and cultures which were steady state?

JH: I think that's a very minor problem, an over-rated problem. people value the wisdom of the past more than I believe it deserves. you go into any society a hundred years ago and I will show you barbarism that you can't even believe.

M2: On the basis of what? Have you studied this? Or is it just prejudice?

JH: I don't believe it's prejudice.

M2: Have you done any cultural studies to back this up?

JH: By barbarism I mean ignorance... as manifested in action, as manifested in the way they treat disease, how they treat each other.

M2: More violently?

JH: Maybe not. But having people exorcise their demons. That sort of ignorance.

M2: There was definitely more ignorance a hundred years ago?

JH: And two thousand years ago, forget about it! I know enough about other cultures to know that, to intuit that.

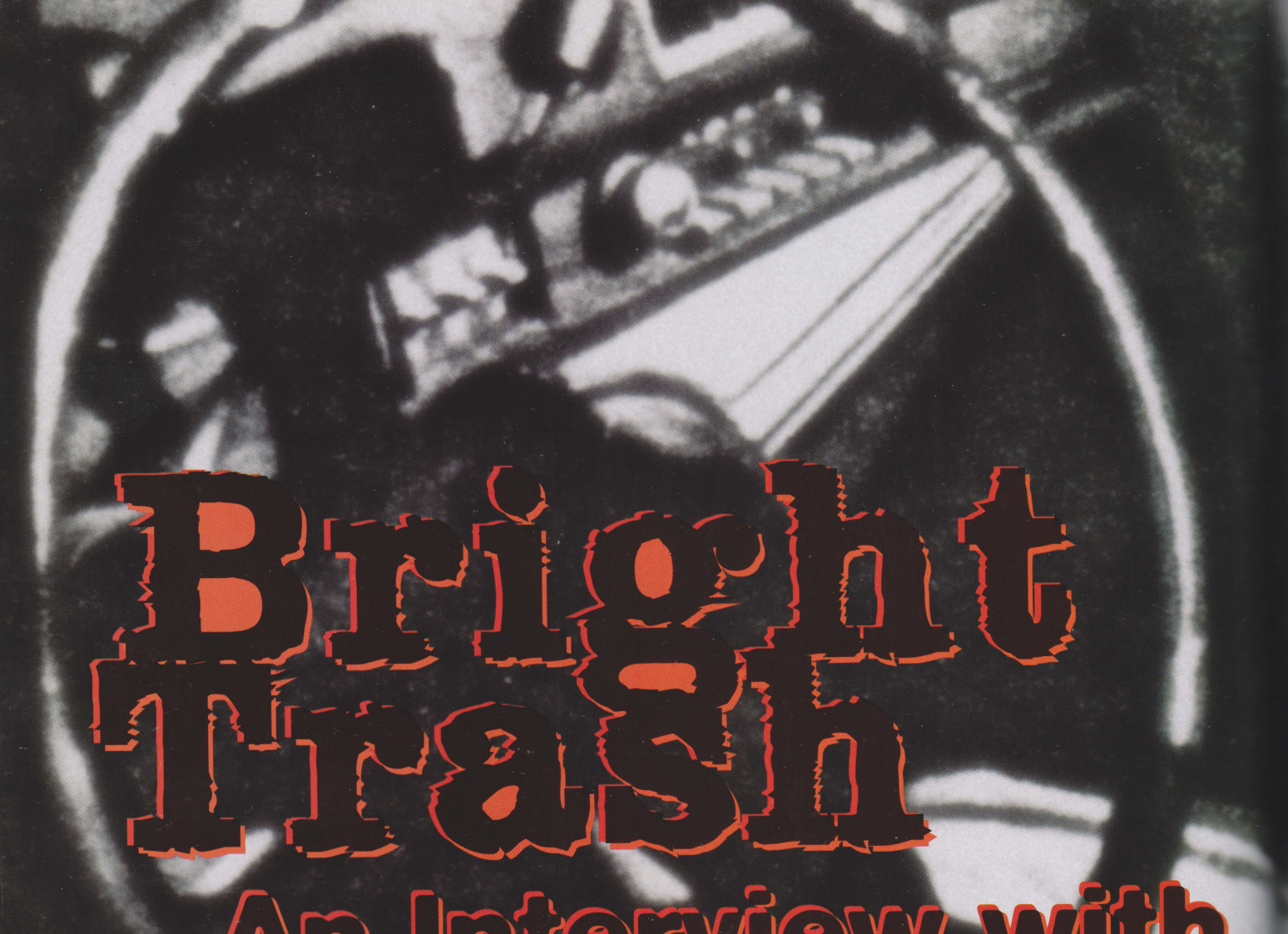
M2: Is your assumption that in the past the quality of life was worse?

JH: Kings five hundred years ago had headlice.

M2: In Europe. We seem to be making assumptions about the past, about health, wellness, life expectancy. Our searchstrings seem flawed. We can gather data and gather data and gather data until our processors expire.

JH: I don't think that's the answer: indiscriminately gathering data. The answer is learning to gather data so that it's there when you need it and so it means something, and get the best possible sense of how likely it is to be true. That's what hypertext, I believe, is going to do in the coming decades: give us access to virtually all the information in the world. Everything that's written will be reviewed. And if you want to know if somebody's theory makes sense, you read it, and then you read the other side and you evaluate who wrote the other side, and what their peers think of them, and what the first person's peers think of him or her, and as information becomes more and more available and huge, that will have to be organized in a way which means something.

What we really want to discover is: What is the fact? A Truth Machine won't get us there, it won't eliminate misconceptions which start out with one person and reproduce themselves. It won't destroy those memes. Yet, in the long run, if the human race survives, it will be because knowledge prevailed. M2



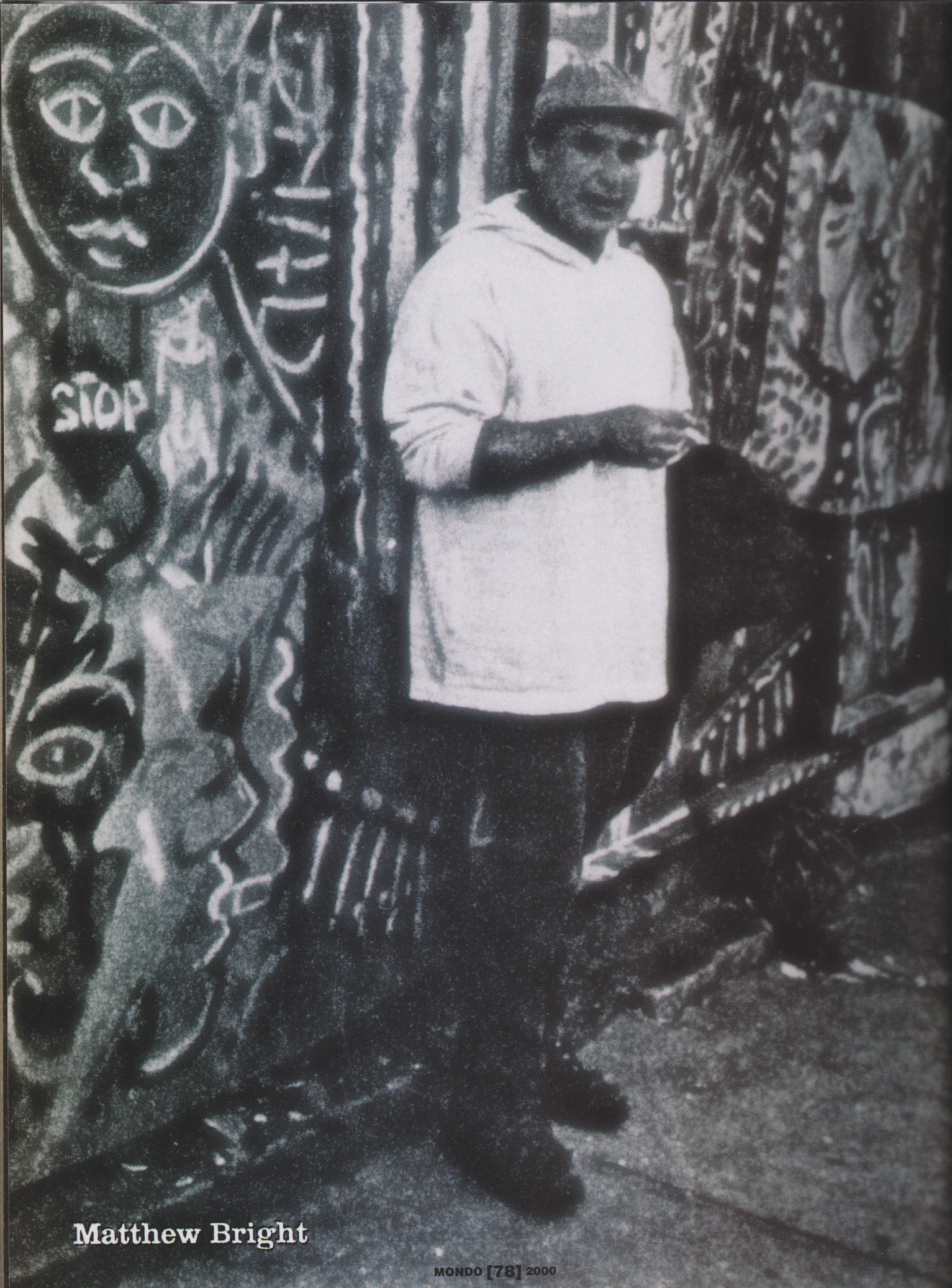
Bright Trash

An Interview with Matthew Bright, Director of *Freeway*

Matthew Bright believes Oliver Stone should be president. It's easy to see why. Oliver Stone personally lined up the stars, executive produced his script—and put him squarely in the director's chair—an unheard of break for someone who'd been toiling in the Hollywood mines for twenty years and authored as many unmade screenplays. A mutual friend handed Stone a copy of the script for Bright's *Freeway*, whereupon he promptly offered his assistance as Executive Producer. He convinced Kiefer Sutherland to take on the role of predatory Bob Wolverton and found



nterview by Tom McIntyre • Photos by Chris Hanley



Matthew Bright

astonishing newcomer Reese Witherspoon for the part of Vanessa Lutz. Matthew says Oliver has all of the political charisma of an FDR without the polio.

At first glance, *Freeway* is a neo-noirish update of the Brothers Grimm fairy tale *Little Red Riding Hood.* Vanessa Lutz is a street-smart teenager with the deck stacked against her from *day one. Her mother is a prostitute and* crack addict, her boyfriend is a dope dealer, and her stepfather has molested her since she was eleven. Once her parents get arrested and her world, such as it is, falls apart, it's off to grandmother's house she goes. Along the way she encounters a kindly stranger with the ominous name of Bob *Wolver*ton. Then, the fun really begins.

Bright has fashioned a hardboiled thriller that is also a devastating lampoon of our country's warped relationship with the media. Disturbingly implicit to the film is our fascination with poor white trash. How many viewers, like Bob Wolverton, think these debased life forms should simply be expunged? How they must love this film in Japan where it confirms all their worst suspicions.

Reese Witherspoon, as Vanessa, even looks like the classic cupie doll manga heroine. Her waifish persona reminds us of Giulietta Massina while her kick-ass hoyden persona keeps the action going at warp speed. *Freeway* is a mordant little comedy that moves like a demon in the speed lane.

—Tom McIntyre

PSYCHO CUTIE

M2: In Vanessa Lutz, you created one of the strongest, most original female characters I've seen on the screen in years. She's also intensely moral in her way. Where did the character come from? Did you just start hearing her voice as you began writing the screenplay?

MB: Yeah, pretty much. I wanted her perfect. The lines were really carefully written. She's from the criminal class, but I wanted to make her a noble person. So she makes money selling crack or hustling. So what? It's not a big deal. The molestation by her stepdad isn't a big deal. This is really the background of a lot of the people who populate the sex industry—people with that kind of background, that get molested and stuff like that. On one *level, you could say she's damaged, but on another level it's just a cultural thing, and she doesn't pay it any mind at all. She has* other issues.

M2: She's a complex character.

MB: I drew Vanessa from reality. Those are real people. But she *is* psycho. She's ruthless. She'll do things that are really ugly.

M2: You wouldn't want to piss her off.

MB: She's a killer. But what else would she be? But she's still cute. *I'd* adopt her. [*laughter*] But then, I'd adopt Beavis and Butthead. [*laughs*]

THOSE ALPHA GIRLS DOWN SOUTH

TM: How did you pick Reese Witherspoon for Vanessa?

MB: I felt that she was a really good actress. But I had no idea *how* good. I'd seen her in *The Man in the Moon* and *A Far Off Place.* She played these sweet kids without this deep gully of darkness in their psyche. So I didn't have any idea what she would bring to it. And I was just amazed. She's just so good.

Actors are magic. They're just magical when they do their thing. I still can't believe what Reese did. I have shots from the car scene where I didn't change the camera for like thirty minutes. And you watched her go through a hundred different expressions in just seconds, just changing... liquid... melting... all over the place. And I would just be like, "Oh, my god!"

M2: This should be a star-making role for her.

MB: I would hope so, but you never know. God, she can play that waifish thing, the forlorn, inarticulate teenager, but she's so complex. And so bright. And so funny.

M2: Isn't she a drama student at Stanford?

MB: Nope. She's studying comparative cultures or something. Anthropology. She comes from a Deep South family of brain surgeons. Brain surgeons! They're sort of like NASA types.

I spent the summer in Nashville, and it's a totally different culture. She was concerned about how this would play in that part of the country.

M2: People with more traditional values.

MB: They *call* them traditional values. They're just a bunch of goddamn Confederate rebels. [*laughs*] I'm sorry. I just blew the interview.

M2: Let the record show that he was *just kidding.*

MB: She's a Confederate, and I'm a Yankee and we had an intense relationship. We pushed each other's buttons and stuff. She worked me just as much as I worked her. It was just very intense.

There's something about the Southern female, that's absolutely undeniable. Southern women are really "alpha." There's a preponderance of alpha women in the South. You know what I'm talking about? They could shoot you. They're very strong. Southern culture is like a matriarchy. It's a different country. They talk English, but it's different.

She's a killer. But what else would she be?

GRIMM AND GRIMMER

M2: What made you decide to base *Freeway* on the Grimm's fairy tale *Little Red Riding Hood?*

MB: Well, I love the way Brothers Grimm did their stuff. These stories really came from a deep, deep place in the human psyche... or the German psyche, at least. And anything that comes from deep in the German psyche is important, you know? And valid. And the resonances of the little girl running off... and the sexual connotations. The whole story is pregnant with different meanings. I didn't think I could improve on it. They say there's like six or seven plots in the whole world. And what I like to do is make great characters. The plot is just a showcase for the characters.

These characters are very serious. I mean, they do a lot of crazy stuff, but the characters are very well-thought out. I respect them. I wasn't fooling around. I mean, particularly, Reese's character, and those girls in the prison society... there are millions of people in this country in the prison system. We're turning into a prison state. So I think it's valid to write a story with these people.

M2: The main character, Vanessa, is probably about 16 years old and illiterate. She struggles to read a simple sentence off the chalkboard in the opening scene. But she knows all of the nuances of the criminal justice system because of her previous scrapes with the law.

MB: She knows a lot—how to make a knife, when she's about to get jumped and how to deal with it.

M2: I really enjoyed the setup where Bob Wolverton meets Vanessa. Kiefer plays it straight, with a lot of apparent sensitivity. You were able to create doubt about his motivations. And that made it all the more terrifying—that this street smart girl could be sucked in by that sort of seemingly earnest psychobabble.

MB: Well, we see that every day on television talk shows—like that bald guy, Montel Williams. They're interviewing people about molestation and incest and the most dysfunctional, god-awful things. And they'll look so sincere. But they're really just giving the audience someone to laugh at. It's like the freak show. It's pseudo-therapy. And it's truly pornographic.

Masters & Johnson used to have some doctor say some arcane fact on sexuality, and then there's a photograph of a woman having some guy come in her face. That's how they did pornography. Well, the same sort of therapeutic angle is being used on television. It's just an excuse to present rape and stuff like that. So I was thinking about those talk show guys. That's what Bob is doing to Vanessa. He's talking pop psychology. I imputed to Kiefer Sutherland's character, Bob Wolverton, all the contempt I have for the Montel Williamses of the world. It's not like the movie has a political cause, the purpose of exposing them, but it was easy to use.

M2: And then there's the scene where Bob's on television being interviewed as this innocent victim of a deranged teenager.

MB: Everybody's on television. That's why *To Die For* was so great. It's just wonderful. The whole country now is like two hundred million people watching television. Some things make them angry. Some things make them glad. Some things make them outraged. Et cetera. They vote according to what they saw on television. Then they go watch television to see what's going to happen next. It's just the people responding to what they're seeing on television. The prisons... because of television. The drug war... television. We're walking around like television-drunk idiots.

FAMILY FUCK

MB: Even with the gun to his head, Bob tries to be manipulative... he weasels, "Oh, I'm sorry." And then he says, "Well you just admitted it, Vanessa. I'm very sick." And, you know, if he'd just reached into Vanessa's pants without being gross and insulting, if he'd been straight and said "I'll give you a ride but I want to grope you all the way to Stockton," she would have let him. If he'd done it like her stepfather Larry, and been nice... She loved Larry. She prays for him.

M2: People will find that shocking. But you could see that she and Larry had more of a relationship than him simply being her molestor.

MB: Well, they had all the dynamics of the family. It was a molesting family, but it was still a family.

M2: Right. You could tell she and her mother loved each other, despite the fact that her mom was a crackhead. Her mom was carried off swinging and laughing and totally insane, and yet...

MB: Go to a Narcotics Anonymous meeting, and you'll see lots of people who love their children and totally went to town on crack or whatever. But they still love their children... although they usually don't turn tricks outside the front door. Leaning out the doorway, "Wanna fuck?" [*laughs*]

M2: Vanessa shows Bob a picture of her father... was that a photo of Richard Speck?

MB: Yeah. I wanted a picture of the real father, and I wanted it to say a thousand things. So the casting agent said, "What should he look like?" And I said, "He should look like this" and showed her a picture of Richard Speck. She said, "OK, I'll find someone." It was one of those things that no one got around to doing. I didn't want to take just anybody, so the line producer said, "Why don't we just use the Richard Speck picture?" And I said, "We will! We will!" [*laughs*] So in a way it works. She talks about how her dad got stabbed to death. So she could be Richard Speck's daughter! [*laughter*].

M2: When Bob was disfigured by the shooting, it was like this internal ugliness that he had concealed his entire life was manifested in this very chilling, disfigured face. One side of him looks completely normal, while the other side was grotesque and very wolflike.

MB: I wanted him to get as doglike as possible. I would have put dog fangs on him, I swear to God.

M2: Bob was quite a work of art by the end of the movie. Also, there were other characters who kind of echoed Bob's wolfish persona. She's surrounded by wolves. Very early on, there was

Larry, of course. And then, there's also Detective Grier. I thought he was interesting because he revealed a lot of his own prejudices and was extraordinarily insensitive not only with Vanessa, but with Bob's wife. [*played by Brooke Shields*]

MB: He's like a Doberman cop. He thinks Vanessa's like a piece of garbage trash that he's seen a million times. She's just a cuter, younger version. And she really presents herself like that during the interrogation. You can see how a real cop would think, "God, what a piece of shit." I had a shot of him bursting into laughter when he looked in and saw her. [*laughs*] But it was too much so I didn't use it.



STONED

M2: How did Oliver Stone become involved with this project?

MB: Oliver has a close friend named Richard Rotowski whom he trusts. So if Richard says to him, "Read this script," he'll read it. So he read a couple of my scripts, liked them, and we had a meeting. He looks at films as art. No compromise. None of that. There's no business. It's art. He said, "First and foremost, it's worthless if it isn't art. You have to be true to it." I'd never heard a guy so powerful in this business talking pure integrity like this all the time. With Oliver, there was no script by committee or people telling me, "You can't do that."

M2: It's refreshing to hear. Stone is such a controversial figure. His pictures tend to focus on some of the really sensitive spots of the American psyche. People seem to either love him or hate him.

MB: Well, I don't get the people that hate him. I just don't get it. The man's an artist with great integrity. Oliver takes on these incredibly difficult things. I mean, who else would have attempted to do *Nixon* and *JFK*? This is hard, hard stuff to get going. I see him as an artist in the tradition of Titian or Van Gogh. The closest approximation you can get to these great filmmakers are the great painters, and he's like that. The people that want to suppress him are only bringing infamy upon themselves. Oliver is writing history. And whether you like it or not, there will be generations way in the future that're gonna look back, and they're gonna know what was really going on.

M2: Their perceptions of certain historical events, like Richard Nixon's presidency or John F. Kennedy's assassination are going *to be influenced by how a movie like JFK or Nixon portrays these* events.

MB: Yeah. Right now he's a filmmaker, but in the future he's gonna have the role of someone like Tacitus writing the story of Rome and Tiberius or Plutarch and these great Roman historians. His importance is only going to grow after all is said and done.

M2: *Freeway* has been compared to *Natural Born Killers*, I guess because of the graphic violence and the association with Oliver Stone. And it's a road movie.

MB: But they are totally different. I mean, I love *NBK*. I it's incredible! See the director's cut. It's so much more coherent. I think the MPAA really likes to get in on scenes and make them less effective. They certainly shouldn't have messed with *Natural Born Killers*. The restored cuts are great.

YESSS SIR!

M2: How did Kiefer Sutherland get involved with the project?

MB: Oliver scheduled a meeting. I hadn't met Kiefer, and I'd only met Oliver twice. Anyway, Kiefer and I were escorted through this really labyrinthine set where *Nixon* was being shot. Suddenly, the two of us emerge into the "Oval Office." It was the set for the Oval Office, the way it was during the Nixon Administration, with these gold Chinese restaurant wall hangings. And suddenly, Oliver blows in there like Roosevelt. He sits down and when he starts talking, it's not about movies, it's about integrity and greatness. It was *really* presidential! And I think the office and Oliver's manner... the guy really does have a Rooseveltian quality—I guess what I'm saying is that the power of the Presidency is what brought Kiefer into the project. [*laughter*]

I'd adopt her...

M2: He was doing it for God and Country? [*laughs*]

MB: Yeah. He could not have done otherwise. Even though he's Canadian. [*laughter*] I seriously don't think we would have gotten him otherwise. I felt very humble, and I loved my country very much when I left that meeting. [*laughter*]

M2: You had to wipe the tears from your eyes? [laughter]

MB: Yes. It made me think of Oliver as President.

He really helped me get a bankable cast. Him saying, "Look. It'll be all right." Because it's edgy. And they were scared. Actors are really afraid of looking ridiculous, or being in a real stinker. They're in a lot of stinkers, but they don't wanna be. And Oliver's

involvement kind of said, "Look. Go with your instincts. It's OK. *I'm* going with it."

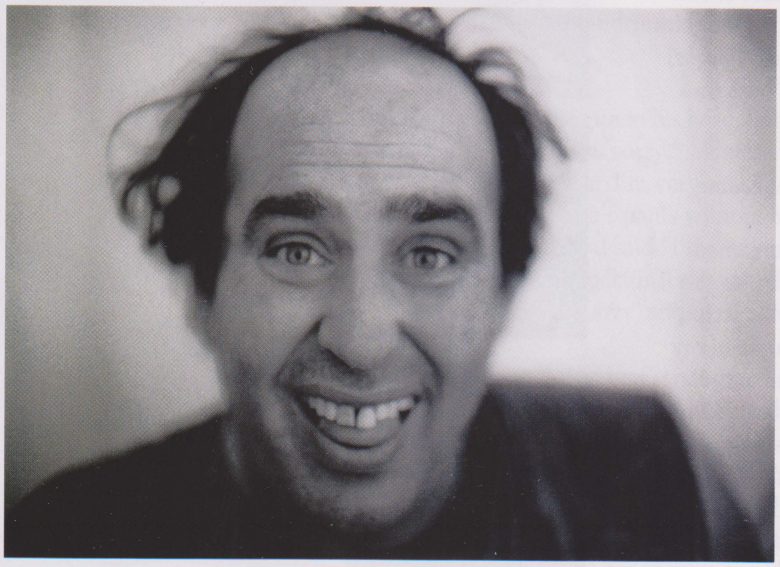
NATURAL BORN DRUG WARS

M2: What do you think about the current discussion regarding artist's responsibilities and influence on society. It does seem like art that inspires some of us in really positive ways—both of us, for instance, like *Natural Born Killers*—might inspire others in a more negative, violent way.

MB: It's sort of like the Internet argument. We want it safe for children, but it isn't a children's medium. It wasn't invented by children. We aren't children. And also, you have people who behave in a violent fashion and then say, "Well, I killed these people because of this movie." I don't buy it.

M2: It's a *really* lame excuse.

MB: It's a good excuse for people to jump on the censorship bandwagon. Nobody censored Shakespeare. Drama has violence in it, OK? God, it's like being in the Soviet Union now.



M2: Part of the problem is that we live in a violent world. In order to reflect it honestly as an artist, you have to show it. And, in turn, that may inspire some lunatic. Like that scene where you show Vanessa making a razor from a toothbrush and a piece of cellophane using heat from a cigarette lighter. It's a very ingenious little invention. Maybe it would inspire somebody...

MB: They make them in prison! That was an expert shiv-making slasher. You have to have representations of real stuff or it wouldn't be any fun. I mean, I never killed anybody.

M2: But you've got that whole thing now where kids are saying they committed murder because they saw *Natural Born Killers.*

MB: Right. And John Grisham is suing Oliver on behalf of one of the victims? Those idiots that committed that crime should ride the lightning. They should go to the electric chair. "Old Sparky" or whatever they call it. And just forget them. It's not the movie's fault. We've had killers with us forever. We've had evil forever. It's always been here. People don't recognize it. Real evil is sneaky. Evil goes in many guises... Pat Robertson... Their idea of freedom is suppressing others. It's just incredible. The government's running a drug war that's turned our inner cities into Hell on Earth. And then they sell them a lot of guns. The government is causing the crime. Crime is a good thing to scare people with.

During the Depression, people didn't worry so much about economic matters because they were worrying about whether we should be drinking alcohol or not. That was a government scam. Now we've got the drug war. It just beclouds the issue. We're putting good, decent people—mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters—in prison for incredibly long periods of time. For getting loaded!

Then, of course, you create the criminal class competition for the drug trade. So *they're* causing the crime—not the movies. It's these bastards we have in government. What a slew of awful, incompetent people that we have ruling us in government, Congress, the Senate and the courts. In many cases, they are the worst people that our society produces. Just the worst. These people have personality disorders. They're sociopathic. They're just scum. Like our governor. I consider him evil.

M2: California's Pete Wilson?

MB: Yeah.

M2: There's that little clip in *Freeway* where the girls in the juvenile prison are watching Pete Wilson give a speech on television, saying that juveniles should be tried as adults, and Bob Wolverton and his wife are shown as examples of people who have been victimized by a minor.

MB: They wouldn't have to try children as adults if it wasn't for their policies. Those crimes wouldn't be being committed. 80% of all violent crime is caused by heroin addicts who need a fix. In Europe, they don't have that crime. We'd have 20% of the crime that we have now, and we would have real evil-doers going to prison if it wasn't for this Drug War. It's just a joke.

M2: Well, we need a war. We don't have the Evil Empire anymore so all we've got is the War on Drugs.

MB: And the wars on blacks, and poor people. This country's terrible to its poor people. *Freeway* grew out of that.

Oh... at Sundance, a critic yelled at me for having Vanessa driving with an open container of alcohol. [*laughs*] I actually was afraid of an NC-17 version. She had alcohol in every car scene, but I didn't use the shots. See, I have a social conscience! [*laughs*]

M2: Both *Gun Crazy*, which you wrote the screenplay for, and *Freeway* feature imperiled, poor young women who strike back at society.

MB: That's my feminine side. [*chuckling*] I just love constructing a great female character. It's fun for me. I love constructing any character, doing it really well, but I've had my best success with girls.

M2: The women I've talked to really enjoyed seeing a character who normally would be the defenseless victim kicking ass.

MB: In *Gun Crazy*, in the script that I wrote, the guy tries to rape the girl and she says "No, I'm going to go take a shower and then you can fuck me." But they cut the film so that the scene fades out during the attack, so it looks like the rape happened. They felt that a woman wouldn't be likeable if she shot somebody for *trying* to rape her. It has to be a complete rape. Also, they thought it was titillating. They really did. Oh God, there's so many crazy people trying to get their own point of view onto the screen...

M2: I thought *Freeway* was funny. But the person who went with me watched it like he was witnessing an autopsy or something.
MB: I guess it depends on what kind of mood you're in. Like sometimes I can't watch certain things. I just can't. Sometimes I can't watch *Ren and Stimpy* if I haven't eaten all day. It makes me sick.

But there are things I want to say. I want to write really intensely developed characters that are totally out there. I want to do serious work. At the same time, the milieu that I come from is like... I used to love Russ Meyer. He's one of my mentors in terms of filmmaking. Him and Peckinpah. I think that you have to put everything into it. And if you do that, you're going to be showing some pathology. And if you're showing pathology, it's like a prism that can refract. You can break things up in a really interesting way.

So you have to take chances. It brings what you're doing to a new level of seriousness. I mean, when I looked at the script, I said, "Oh, my God. People are going to think I'm nuts." Like my mother. She hated it, violently hated the movie.

M2: A lot of people just don't get dark humor.
MB: It's true. You've got to have some context about what we are. I mean, sure, the world is depressing and unjust, but it's still the only world we've got. And I'd like everybody—even the people who come from families like Vanessa's—to be able to step up to the plate. Everybody.

M2: What particularly do you hope you've communicated to people when they reflect on Vanessa's harrowing odyssey to Grandmother's house?
MB: I didn't really think in terms of a message because that's like propaganda. When you come up with what you want to say first and build the story around that to push your point, then you're just Doktor Goebbels. That's all you're doing: "Let's make a movie that puts down this or puts down that." That's propaganda.

I would be happy if everybody would look at the film and like the Vanessa character. At the same time, I realize that people are wild animals, and there's no norm. It's like what David Lynch was showing in *Blue Velvet:* the insects are eating each other under the grass, and then he pans up to the people. It's just bigger bugs, you know?

THE PLANE! THE PLANE!

M2: I've got to ask you—are you Squeezit Henderson?
MB: [*laughter*] This interview is over! Goodbye! [*more laughter*] Yeah, I am. [*Bright appeared pseudonymously as both of the Henderson Twins: Squeezit and his sex slave sister, René, in the cult/camp classic,* Forbidden Zone. *Herve Villechaize—The midget in* Fantasy Island*—co-stars as "King Fausto of the Sixth Dimension."*]

M2: I mentioned I was interviewing Matthew Bright to a friend and he said, "Oh, Squeezit Henderson!" Then, he brought me this dub of a dub of a dub copy of *Forbidden Zone.* It's sort of a stinker/revelatory masterpiece.
MB: That's when I was Herve Villachaize's roommate. He was in a relationship with Susan Tyrrell who plays the Queen in the movie at that time. When I met Herve, there were these two twin sisters holding him down, trying to take pain pills out of his pocket. That's how I met him. We really hit it off.

M2: So who put that film together? Was that Herve's financing?
MB: Oh no. That was pre-*Fantasy Island.* Some of it was made in the 1970's and some in the early 1980's. There are a couple of scene breaks where there was a three-year hiatus between shootings. When Herve got his gig on *Fantasy Island* he cleaned up and became Mr. Straight, but previous to that, he was just a little degenerate.

M2: So he had a bit of a "substance problem"?
MB: Well, he was in constant pain so he had to take opiates constantly. I mean, his organs were normal. But his bones, the rib cage and what's housing it, and the musculature were small. Consequently, sometimes he couldn't even get out of bed in the morning because everything was squished. He couldn't even take a full breath, even though he had the same size lungs. He had normal lungs, normal heart, normal organs, normal dick... but it's like putting all of our guts into a body half the normal size. So he was in constant pain. It was the pain that made him blow his brains out.

M2: That's very sad.
MB: He was a vicious little guy. [*laughs*] About a year after we stopped being roommates, this girl came to my house, and she said, "Do you remember me?" and I said, "No." And she said, "I'm Herve's girlfriend, and he beat me with a curtain rod." She was all welted up and everything. So I let her stay at my house until she could fly back to New York.

WEREWOLVES4LIFE

M2: What's next?
MB: I have a movie called *Hands.* It's about kids from one of those schools run by the government for children without any boundaries—kids who are dangerous to other children. There are these little kids that'll molest, kill children, torture animals, light fires. Bed wetting, fire starting, cruelty to animals—those three things will get you in one of those schools. And they try to reënact their early infancy.

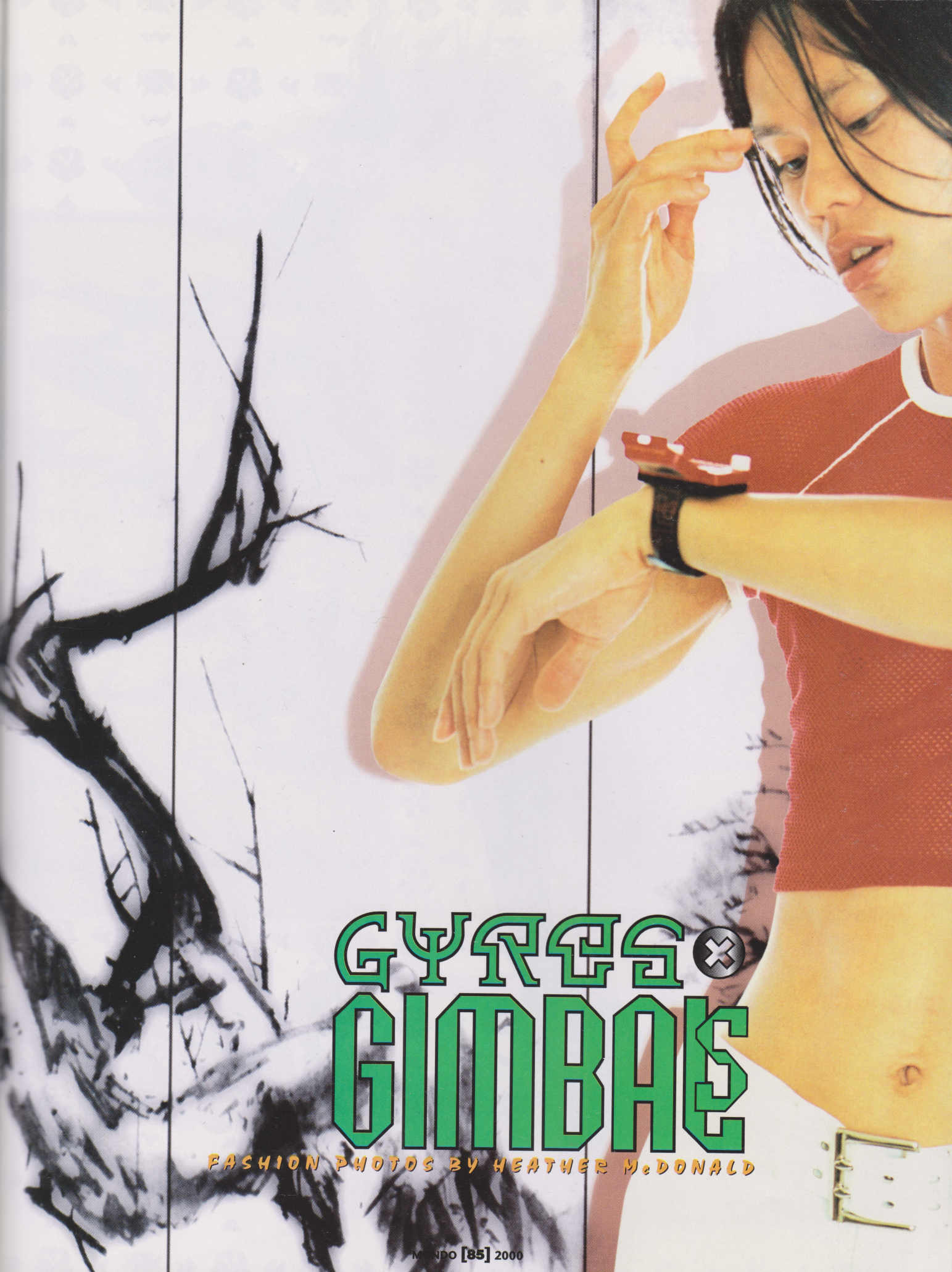
M2: Reprogram them?
MB: Yes. They have to do it when they're really young. After they're eight or nine years old, forget it. They're hopeless, and they will be psychopaths.

Anyway, I've got a paranoid kid who hears voices laughing at him. And there's another kid with no conscience. It's a remake of *Oliver Twist.*

...but I'd adopt Beavis and Butthead

I'm also doing a satire of the drug war. It's got a drug in it that turns gang members—black and brown only—into werewolves for 45 minutes. [*laughs*] And the protagonists are like the guys on *Cops,* the TV show. They just treat it like a normal drug bust, but there are these masturbating werewolves being handcuffed and searched. They're not super strong, so you can arrest them. And they're like, "Fuck you, pig!" They're snarling. And there are wolf heads on the hood of the police car while they're being put in handcuffs and taken to jail... until they come down. The drug makes you grow hair on your palms and hop uncontrollably. You fuck the air... [*howling laughter*] M2

CLOTHES: X-GIRL PANTS & THRIFT TOP
MODEL: MITCHELL MCCORMACK, FORD MODELS
SUNGLASSES: BLACK FLYS
WATCH: ETCH A SKETCH



FASHION PHOTOS BY HEATHER McDONALD


TOUR
PRO EXTREME EDGE
ABEDA



Model: Johanna/ Look Agency

Camera: Kodak DC50

Inline Skates: Roller Derby, IL

Clothes: Villains, SF

Shoes: Gimme Shoes, SF



BY LIFE SNOWBOARDS
GRRL BOARDS

PHOTOSHOP by Heide Foley
STUDIO: Missy Miller, SF
STYLIST: Todd Smith
HAIR & MAKEUP: Nei Cruz for Zenobia



Photographs by HEIDE FOLEY

The Dakota. The name resonates through the decades. Who can forget its gargoyled exterior, the scene of one of the most tragic dénouements of all time? Cruel fame, implacable, relentless as a stalking fan—Perry should know something about the everyday psychopathology of fame.

The interview was Perry's idea; he'd been hanging out with Sean. Perry Farrell, everybody's favorite fool on the hill or, in the words of *Spin,* "space-cadet-or-visionary-take-your-pick." Perry reveres Yoko.

It's a good time for both of them. Perry's Porno for Pyros is riding high off their best CD yet, *Good God's Urge*—a quirky South Sea islands-on-acid sort of thing. Yoko's latest, *Rising,* made with the help of 19-year-old Sean, got better reviews than the long awaited *Beatles Anthology* that was released around the same time. She also has a pair of websites (http:// www.yoko.com and http://dnp.sv.expo96.ad.jp/ yoko/acorns) and a touring art show, making 1996 very much the Year of Yoko.

Coming from different worlds, both have experienced the dangerous incandescence and black shadows cast by an intense public spotlight. They are media survivors. Which explains why Yoko's eyes are invariably cloaked with heavily tinted dark glasses, and why Perry has the naked awareness of a wild creature escaping the glare of fast-approaching headlights. For both, the personal self and the public persona have become so intertwined that it's impossible to separate them. Like the Titans of Greek theogony, they act out society's dramas of good and evil, success and failure, loss and redemption.

—Ladd McPartland

Yoko Perry ONO FARRELL

talk about

Gotta get a

raincheck

Assisted by Ladd McPartland

N.Y. Production Coördination by Meg Bowles, Ektachrome 100 film supplied by Kodak, Perry's make-up by Lorin Cole, Yoko's make-up by Hiromi Ando

Gotta Get A Rainhook on PAIN

CELEBRITY ROAST

Perry Farrell: I have this idea, although I don't know how you'll feel about it.

Yoko Ono: About what?

PF: About being completely honest about everything.

YO I'm always honest in interviews. Don't feel inhibited. I mean, please ask me anything.

PF: I've been thinking about fame. I believe that fame and celebrity are dissolving somewhat.

YO: Because everybody gets their 15 minutes.

PF: Well, yeah. Tim Leary said that the most important thing about being famous is you get to have a voice. Because of the Internet, we can all be famous now in the sense that we can have a voice. Celebrity is being eradicated. People looking up at people is becoming looking *across* at people. Your ex-husband had fame when fame was at its height. You'll notice, there hasn't been anybody as mythologically famous as Marilyn Monroe and James Dean and John Lennon since. It reached an apex. I believe now there's a unity consciousness where we all have to look across the board at each other and work together. We can't separate. As a very famous person, do you believe that? Are you OK with that?

YO: Well, I think that the Web and the Internet and all of that is helping, in the sense that people can speak up and communicate with anybody on earth at any time they want to. It's great that this horizontal communication is happening on a very large scale.

But at the same time, I don't think of fame in that sense that you speak of. I think that...

PF: Well, let me pose the question to you. Has anybody ever been as famous as John Lennon since?

YO: I don't know.

PF: No. And what about Marilyn Monroe or James Dean? Notice, it was all in that small period of time.

YO: You know what I think? I think fame is a very strange phenomenon. But it's always been. It's about ritual. They always need somebody to look up to and somebody to maybe, umm... scapegoat. And there was always that sacrificial lamb thing, and they actually had the human sacrifice and all. And when you *really* look into fame, it's an ambiguous thing.

PF: There's infamy.

YO: Yeah. For instance, two very specifically different kind of fames existed in our household. John Lennon was a hero and I was a scapegoat. I was the sacrificial lamb, you know. But we both served a purpose, in the sense that there's a certain kind of emotion that people have that they want to attach to something. Love was attached to John and hate was attached to me, which is a very interesting phenomenon.

It had very little to do with who we were actually. We were out there... like symbols. And, you know, this particular ritual is something that had been there for a long time—to sacrifice somebody. It was always either a lamb or a woman. You know, a virgin or whatever. You know, they just want to sacrifice a woman.

I was a lamb. The hero was usually a guy. This kind of a ritual is probably something deeply connected with human emotion.

PF: I can tell you. I have had a very similar, almost identical occurrence within my own body. I have become the hero and the scapegoat.

YO: At the same time.

PF: At the same time, for having created Jane's Addiction and having killed Jane's Addiction. So, I know how you feel.

YO: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

PF: I know *just* how you feel.

YO: Well, it's not a feeling. It's just a...

PF: It's not a feeling. It's a resistance to change.

YO: My *feelings* about that are a separate subject. But as a social phenomenon, it's very interesting, you know. I've learned a lot from it. I was *that* to the public but my actual being had a separate life.

PF: Well, I will tell you this. Maybe you don't think I could understand the feeling. But I was hated for breaking up Jane's Addiction, although I was the one who created it. I created it, but I also destroyed it.

YO: Yeah. Yeah.

PF: It's something that I had to do. It had to occur. But people that really loved me would want me to move on and progress.

YO: Sure. Sure.

PF: But people don't want to give up their favorite food, so to speak. And they get angry with you.

YO: It's that bit about saying, "Mommy, daddy, don't change." You automatically become a father figure or mother figure by becoming famous.

PF: But the flip side of the coin is, if we don't change, we're hated anyway. Eventually, you're looked at as a...

YO: A has been.

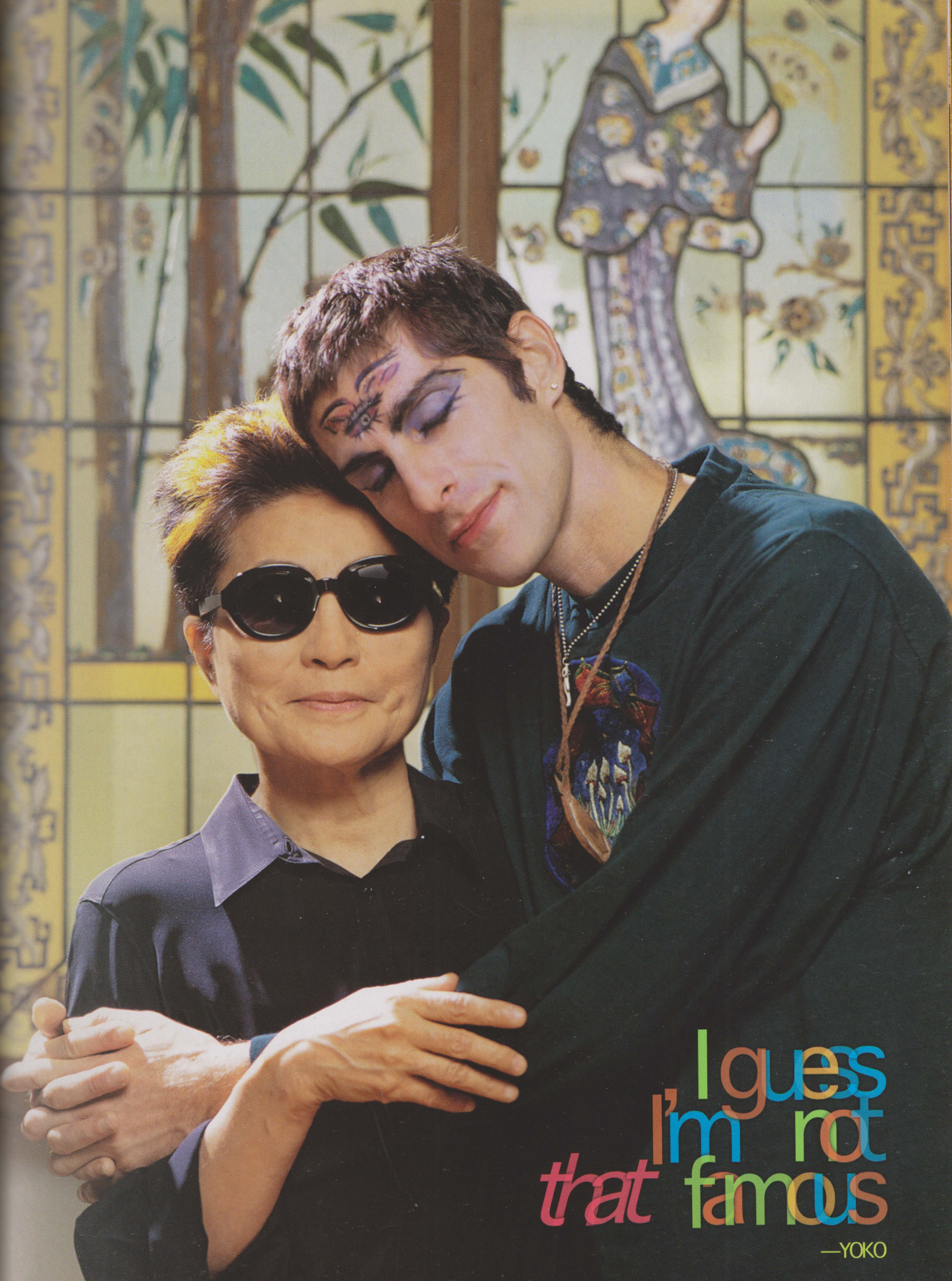
PF: A *has been!* For not changing... lacking new ideas. There's no winning. I, for one, give you credit for having tremendous strength in the face of it all.

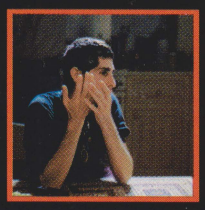
YO: Well, I didn't do anything particularly noble really.

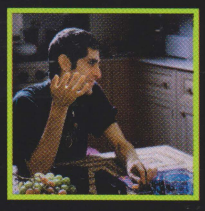
PF: Fame has become a curse. Two days ago I thought my curse is that I've become famous so I tried to kill myself.

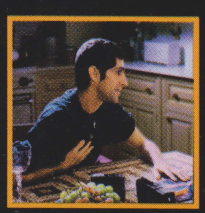
YO: Oh no. Please!

PF: Yes, I did. I wanted to be reborn. The beautiful part of death is that you become a voyeur. And being a voyeur is like


I guess
I'm not
that famous
—YOKO







being a reporter. Being a reporter is like being a poet. You get to report. You get to look. But when you're famous, you're being looked *at*. Your creativity dries up. So what I tried to do by dying was to become artistic again.

YO: Or maybe by dying you become more powerful.

PF: I wanted to be able to just observe and be a poet again.

YO: I guess I'm not *that* famous.

PF: You're *not*?!?

YO: Well, I'm being paradoxical Perry. If you focus your attention on your fame, then you're famous. But if you're not focusing on that, if you're focusing on something else, you're *not* famous. So I don't think anything's a curse unless you make it a curse. My feeling is that you can change everything into a blessing if you want to.

I think it's kind of sad if you attach yourself too much to fame. I don't think that's your power. I think your power is something you have regardless of being famous or infamous. It's your soul, your spirit. And I for one have received it from your music. Incredible.

PF: But, I know that you were doing a lot before you ever met John Lennon. And I really want to know... did you lose creativity by becoming famous? Did you lose some freedom? I really need to know that. Do you feel like you've lost a very precious part of yourself because of fame?

YO: No. Definitely not. It's a very interesting subject. My feeling is...

PF: I believe... I truly believe that desperation and isolation are like manure. They breed creativity. And so if you tell me that I'm wrong, I'm going to listen to you. But I'm really...

YO: OK. May... may I finish what I'm saying?

PF: Yes.

YO: OK. Isolation I have. I have *that*.

PF: You never regretted the fame from the John Lennon connection? Do you ever feel like you could have walked alone and you would have had your own legs to stand on? And now this overshadowing took away from any light you might shed by yourself?

YO: Wait a minute here! Overshadowing—that's something that *you're* thinking from outside. Was I overshadowed by him? Well, maybe not from the inside.

PF: No, I'm thinking as an artist... like, you could have done your art and been appreciated for it. And now you're appreciated for being the wife of John Lennon. But you've made beautiful, strange, exciting art. I know about the art that you made before you ever met him.

YO: OK. When I was an avant garde artist, in that relatively small world, I was coming to a point where I was on the top of that hill. And it was kind of boring. I mean, where do you go from there? It's an ivory tower. I kind of came down the hill. And it was much more interesting to kind of throw myself into the muck of rock and roll—kind of roll around in the mud. That was very good for my creative energy. It was good.

You see, the worst thing you can do to yourself as an artist is to be in still water. And I got to move away from that and, you know, roll in the mud with John Lennon for awhile. That's how I perceived what happened. And yes, it was a very challenging situation. But I needed some challenge. I mean, I didn't need to sit on top of the hill saying I'm the grand artiste avant-garde. I had to go into a totally different field which was very exciting.

So even when the whole world was attacking my work, it was the opposite of drying up. I just kept creating. And it was great. It was a great creative stimulation to meet somebody like John and be together with him. And we gave each other this creative impetus. So the fact that my name was overshadowed is a superfluous kind of concern.

PF: I want to raise a point about the Web and fame. If you really want to know what people think about you and you really want to squash your own preconceived notions about yourself, read what people say about you on the Web. Because they have no axe to grind. They have nothing to uphold.

Heide Foley: They're not looking you in the eye.

PF: Right. You'll really get an accurate reflection of yourself on the Web. It's very refreshing. They really slam you sometimes. And you will never get that opinion anywhere else *but* on the Web.

YO: Yeah, but then again I wonder what kind of people they are, you know? They have some resentments maybe. So you can't really just trust what the Web says either. I would trust more what my immediate people would say, you know. Like my son. The Web is another way of expanding communication. But also, there's a downside. I mean, all media has two sides. It's double-edged.

HISTORY HAS TEETH

PF: I am going to give you good news.

YO: Yeah, OK. What?

PF: Do I talk too much?

YO: No. No. Go ahead.

PF: Are you sure?

YO: Yes.

PF: OK. I believe that you really don't know how history will look on you after your death. It can be the exact opposite as in life. So you might think... well, I was put in this world to be a great football player and a great runner. But eventually you learn that you're going to be remembered as the most famous murderer that ever got away with murder.

YO: Or something like that.

PF: So... I don't know. Something tells me that you think that you're perceived by people as evil. But you might be surprised to learn that eventually you'll be looked at as a woman with great courage who really kept in touch with her emotions as a human. The humanness is what gets taken away from us—or we forget it ourselves—when we get involved in public perception. We lose touch with ourselves.

YO: Giving yourself up to public perception is like throwing the dice in the air. I try not to concern myself too much. I think it's like an animal that you can't control. You just sort of have to leave it at that. Particularly while creating something, if you try to second guess how it's going to be received...

PF: It's ruined.

YO: You can't do it.

PF: *I* can't do it. That's why I can't get involved with film.

YO: No. No. No. Of course not.

PF: Because in Hollywood films, they test it before an audience. Isn't that sickening? Doesn't that sicken you?

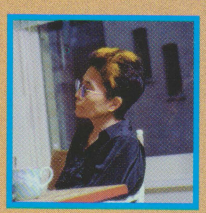
YO: Exactly.
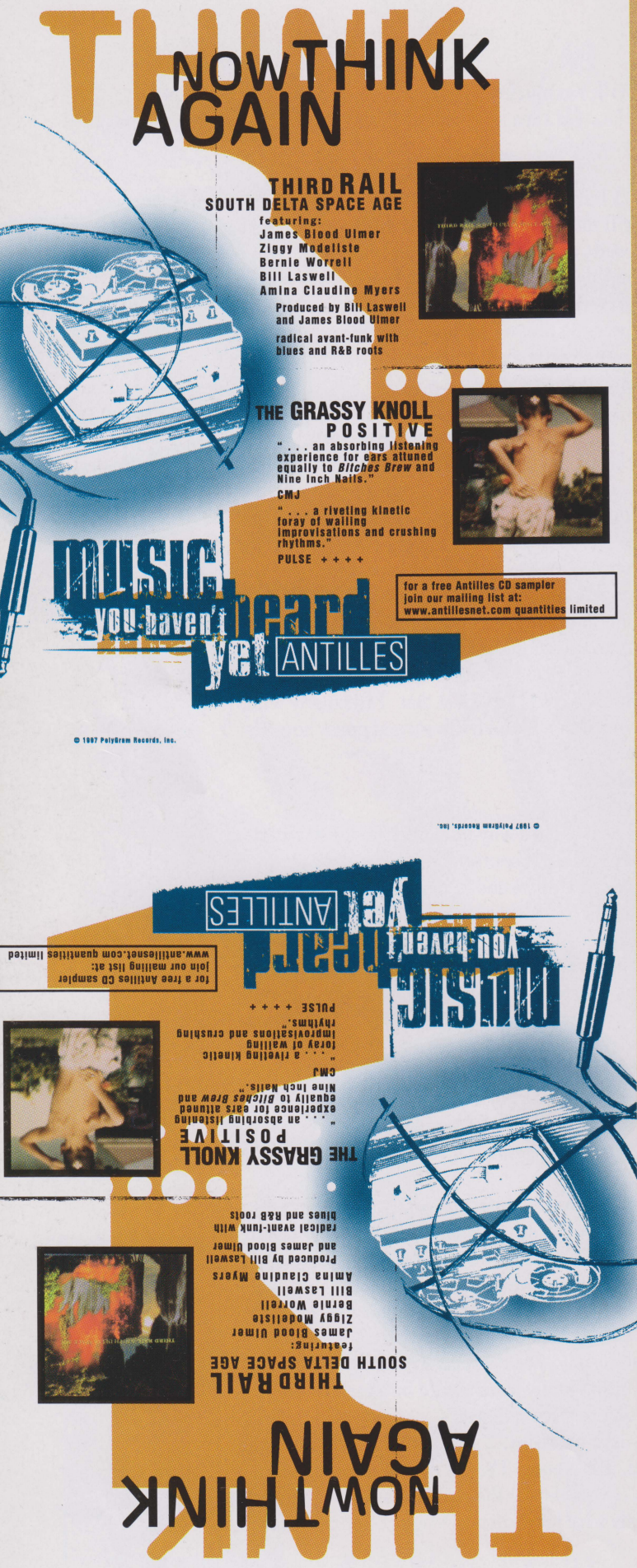
PF: I mean, I started this website called *Teeth*. Initially we were asking people for money. So they wanted to read *exactly* what we were going to do. Well, thank God it didn't work out. I just said I would rather spend my own money and not know what I'm going to do. And it's so much more fun. I mean, it's a simple word. It's a word that children use. But we ought to remember the word, because it's such a simple beautiful word. Fun.

I've had so much more fun with a person on the street who says, "Can I have five bucks?" And I said, "Well, I'll give you five bucks, but I want you to come into my Web site and tell me about life and do something on the computer—even though you've never worked with it. Do something artistic." And I'll put that up for the day. I could *never* have storyboarded that, because I didn't know there would be a man waiting for me to ask for five dollars.

So, presupposition... forget about it. I'm not interested. It's a bore. There's no room for miracles.

YO: You... you just hit the nail on its head. I mean, that's exactly what I want to say. Magic... you can't plan it.





MON DIEU! YA KNOW IT AIN'T EASY

YO: You know, we did that bed-in. And John was totally excited about doing it.

PF: Oh good. I'm glad you're speaking of it.

YO: Why? Why?

PF: Because I've been thinking about it. There's ideas that I've had that relate to it.

YO: Okay, well...

PF: Because it deals with the belief that you as a single individual could really help world peace. What a grand thought and a tremendously courageous attempt. It didn't *work* exactly...

YO: I think that it worked in a sense. I mean, if you think by doing the bed-in next month or next year there'll be some announcement that there's not going to be any more war in the world—if you're expecting that, of course it didn't work. But it had a tremendous impact. And maybe other people decided to do something creative about peace.

PF: Well, *I* remember the bed-in so...

YO: At that time, I was sort of talking about what influences people have in the world. And, I said to John that this one young French girl killed Robespierre and by killing him, she changed history.

And I said, you know, you don't have to be famous. You don't have to be rich. You don't have to be powerful. I mean, powerful in the societal sense. You can just have the will and you can change history.

This is what I was saying, and I was saying it to a man who was famous, powerful. And he was sort of saying, hmmm, maybe you are right. But he said that this is a negative example. I said, well, we can create a positive example. Because in my own way, I was doing something like that, standing on Trafalgar Square with a bag over my head, saying that I'm doing this for peace. And John would say—Yes, but it has more effect if you're famous. Which is probably true. But I believe that everything that you do in the world affects the whole world. So that discussion led to us putting our heads together and coming up with the bed-in.

STEAL THIS NEGATION

YO: I had a museum show called "This is Not Here" and all the objects that were in this room were stolen by fans. So it really became like... *this is not here!* [*laughs*] I really think that the word itself has so much power. So I'm very careful about it.

CRIMINAL LOVE IS ALL CRIMINALS NEED

YO: Because there are so many elements to society, no matter who you are, you can get love. What kind of love you want is up to you. For instance, there's a criminal society where being a criminal is the only way you can get love.

PF: I think criminal love is overriding. Like, on the one hand, the average male would detest the idea that he's in any way homosexual. But the average male has an overriding desire for the response of another male... that whole macho thing.

YO: It's a male society. So getting an approval of another male means that you are getting an approval by the society.

PF: I think it's our overriding problem.

YO: I think so too.

PF: I just don't enjoy slaughtering people. I enjoy loving people. And I enjoy bonding. And I enjoy amalgamations. And attraction. I enjoy attraction.

So, being that as it may, I would like to head towards Venus. I would like to be privileged to live on Venus. Which doesn't mean that I would be material. It just means that their resonances are beyond the conception of the eye. In other words, we can't see these resonances.

I think that if you could resonate at the unconditional love vibration, you would be able to live amongst the Venusians. And the Venusians could have these beautiful orgies that include having sex with men and women, children and animals. Anything your heart desired. Of course, you can never abuse anything. But there would be these tremendous orgies.

YO: Yeah. Sure. Sure. Sure.

BOMBS AWAY

PF: I think bombs are passé.

YO: But nuclear bombs now, I understand that anybody can make one. You know, it's very simple.

HF: The recipe's probably is on the Net.

PF: Right. Which means it's passé.

YO: Yeah. OK. If everybody can make nuclear bombs, then we have bring the responsibility back to each person. And we have to really start to create the perfect climate of love. It's come to that.

WILL MUSIC BECOME A THERAPEUTIC ANONYMOUS ZONE?

PF: This music business that we've been involved with for so long is going to crumble. I can't wait for it to happen. Because there's so much good music that can be made by people that aren't famous. But the music industry counts on the familiar face to sell his six trillion records, instead of spreading this out.

They don't want to hear this in the music industry. But it's coming. Anonymity is coming. There are lots of people that can put out music who don't care to have their face shown or do an MTV video.

YO: That's fine. The society is getting less elitist. It's good.

PF: I believe that we're all capable of making fantastic music. You don't need to know what they look like. You don't need to see how cute they are in their brand new fashionable clothes. And I'm sorry, MTV… I have such battles with them. And I keep telling them, something has got to change. With the Web and all, anybody can get their music to anybody else. They don't need MTV.

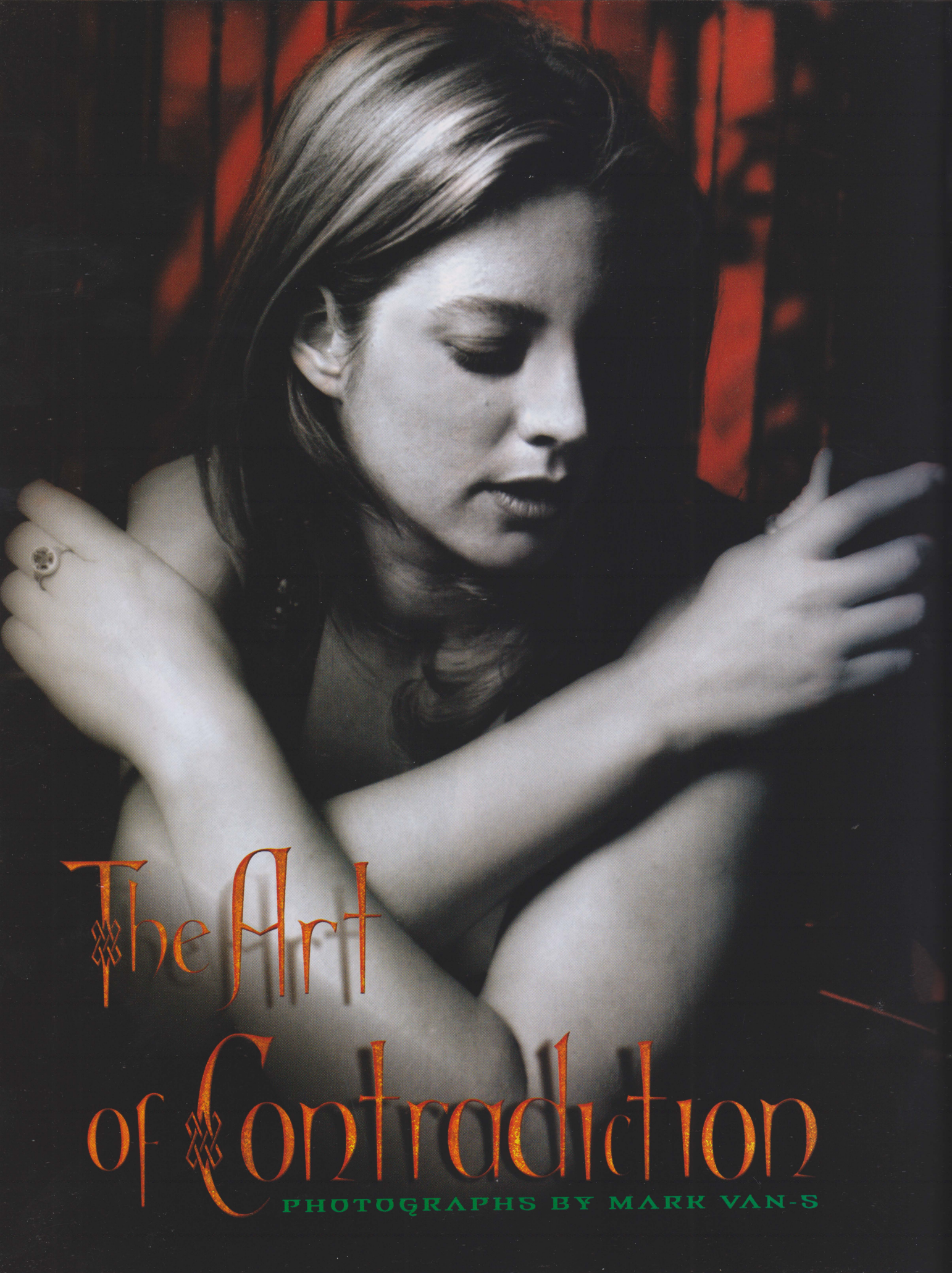
YO: I think music will remain as therapy more than like entertainment industry, you know. It's become a health therapy. You can get your emotions out or whatever. You know?

PLAYING THE AKASHIC RECORDS

PF: There's a small chamber in the Sphinx that the Egyptian government still won't open. People are still trying to convince them to open the chamber. And it's said that the chamber holds the history of the earth. I'm really counting on that.

YO: I think that chamber is our brain. I think that our brain is a fine computer, the finest, and in our brain cells there is a certain part where all memories are intact. M2




The Art
of Contradiction
PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARK VAN-S

Folk siren and recluse, Sarah McLachlan is the queen of contradiction. The candor is there, the complexity, the tensile strength of a soul quenched and tempered by her own excesses. **by Megan Olden**



Mondo 2000: *The Freedom Sessions* are extremely playful and more of a raw energy—a departure from the careful delivery of *Fumbling Towards Ecstasy*.

Sarah McLachlan: Ooh. You think it was a careful delivery—really? [*laughs*] That's an interesting way to put it. For me, *Fumbling* was very much an exercise in allowing the mistakes to remain. And *The Freedom Sessions* was even more so. It's very playful and loose. A lot of the songs are outtakes from *Fumbling*, from earlier sessions. I really just wanted to show the process because people assume that the songs bloom full grown like they appear on the record, and they don't. One of the main focuses of *The Freedom Sessions* was to stop being anal, and stop editing myself and just let things flow. The very name itself is sort of like letting go, letting yourself be out of control. I wish I could get it back now.

M2: It's cyclical.

SM: Yeah. But it will be something different this time. You can't go down the same path again. That would be redundant. I don't want to. I've found none of my old tricks work anymore.

M2: In "Dear God" on *Rarities, B-Sides & Other Stuff* your voice was almost shrieky. How does your process differ when you're doing a cover?

SM: Well, there's a great freedom in doing covers. It's not your song. You already know it's a great song. I picked songs I had a strong emotional reaction to. In singing that, I was really surprised at what came out of me. I've never sung like that before. At the end of it, my heart was pounding and I was shaking. I got so angry and so aggressive in that last part. I have no idea where it came from. I did three vocals and I couldn't sing after that. I just completely destroyed my voice because I sang so hard. That's where the song asked me to go and so I followed it. But I thought I was going to have a heart attack.

M2: You're currently at work on a new album. Are you about to go back into the studio again?

SM: Basically at this point everything's taken precedence over writing. I've been kind of doing that on purpose—I just needed to have a little bit of a life, a normal life after two years on the road. In many ways touring feels like suspended reality, in that so much goes by you and you can't focus on it because you're moving in this whirlwind. So I really needed to get grounded again and I haven't been focusing much on music or songwriting, more on living, on getting rooted again. Once I'm in the studio setup, focusing on that full-time, then hopefully the rest will come. I'm in no great hurry.

MIRROR, MIRROR

M2: So performing isn't your favorite part of the process?

SM: Oh, quite the opposite. I adore it. I love playing live. It's the 22 other hours of the day that are in suspended reality. Not that being up on stage and being put on the pedestal and somewhat idolized is not a suspension of reality because it certainly is, but that's not the reason I do it. I simply love playing.

But you're living in this little cocoon on the road and the world is spinning around you sort of slightly out of your reach. Maybe it's just because I haven't found a way to balance both worlds, it seems like it's all or nothing.

M2: Sounds almost like it's a *Through the Looking Glass* experience, everything turned on its head.

SM: Very much. It's very surreal. You don't even notice until you've been shocked out of it back into your home after six months of being gone. Okay, you're home now, you recognize these walls, but everything is slightly lopsided for a while. It's probably like being out at sea for six months, or living in a submarine. I lose a lot of myself the longer I'm out. I've become... not antisocial, but not as social as I used to be. The amount of people that I have to deal with every day and be nice to—not that I don't want to be nice to them—but you know, some days you feel like a bag of shit and you just want to be that and you can't...

M2: Because you're a public figure.

SM: Yeah. Twice in my life I've fallen off the track and decided to just be who I felt like at the moment and have really hurt people. It's like, Oh Jesus, what do you do?

M2: Do you think the content of your work—as introspective as it is—lends itself to people putting a lot of expectations on you?

SM: It is awkward. People often ask why do I lay my heart on my sleeve, as it were. I have this huge separation between me and music, even though when I'm writing it, it's very personal. I'm right in the middle of it and very involved in it. It's almost like I'm two people, or three, or five people. In one verse I'm talking about me, in another verse I'm talking about someone else. But because I'm talking in the first person it always seems like me. Half of the experiences in the song aren't mine, they're me putting myself in other people's shoes. How would I feel if... ? And then there's creative license too. A lot of it is pure fiction.

M2: But the things you choose—even if you make them up—*do* reflect on you.

SM: Exactly. Whether I'm saying "I" being someone who's been through a terrible relationship and is broken by it—and yeah, I have been—that's the thing... in a particular song, I'm not necessarily talking about me, but it seeps in there and it is personal and people do relate to it, to the honesty of it. That's one of the reasons I enjoy playing live so much. The greatest thing for me about making music is to see people affected by it.

It's not like I want to be disconnected from people. I really don't. The whole very notion of fame is so stifling because it's not just five people coming up to you in a day. When you have that kind of energy aimed at you with hundreds of people, it gets overwhelming sometimes. It's really eerie. I have to build up... I wouldn't want to say a wall against it, but just a thick skin, or I'd dissolve within it. I have to keep a bit of a separation or it just becomes too much.

MOTHERMETAPHOR

M2: You repeatedly invoke mother imagery in your music, ranging from the absolute mother figure in "Mary," to a daughterly perspective in "Elsewhere." "Good Enough" merges back and forth...

SM: Yeah, that was one of the songs I was mentioning earlier about how one verse is "I," the next verse is somebody else. That song is pretty skewed. There's lot of different things going on.

M2: It seems to parallel your growth from girl to young woman—your songs almost a *Bildungsroman* in progress?

SM: I look at my music as a bit of a diary for myself, as a cathartic way of working through my own neuroses [*laughs*], being a product of my parents, and my upbringing. That is obviously something that has inspired me continuously, trying to sort out all my angers and my frustrations with my parents, with childhood, with all the weirdness that goes on through adolescence and stuff. I had never had an outlet for any of that before, so it all came out in the songs.

Whether it's obvious to the listener or not, a lot of these songs are very therapeutic in the process of writing them. It made me forgive on a lot of levels. I think one of the reasons I'm having such a hard time right now writing is that I'm so happy, I'm so zenned out and content—I have nothing to write about. It's weird. It's like I don't have any angst anymore.

M2: In the past you've written from a place of pathos.

SM: Most of the time, yes. There's a hole that I'm in and there's a desire to get out of it. Or being emotionally drawn and quartered. And I never find any answers. I don't think there are any concrete answers.

I haven't yet found a place to write from about happiness. I'm not sure if happiness is supposed to be written about. It's something untouchable and intangible for me, this beautiful thing, that trying to describe it would belittle it or would taint it.

M2: Create a parody.

SM: Yeah. It just wants to exist and just to be. I don't have words for it. Maybe it's a state of nothing. [*laughs*] It has similar tones to depression, but just the opposite. Depression is really a tangible emotion that you can sink your teeth into. There are lots of words to describe it and lots of meaty stuff to whine about. I find it easy to write when I'm in that state. Now I don't have a need to do it. I've always said that writing is a selfish act. I've done it for myself to work through things.

IN PRAISE OF SOLITUDE

M2: What are your creative constructions?

SM: That's the problem. I haven't been able to find my path. A lot of it is a matter of discipline. The other very necessary thing, at least in the past, has been for me to be by myself for a long period of time. When I'm alone and calm and quiet all sorts of stuff comes up, usually because I start to go a little crazy. It opens up all sorts of doors to the unconscious.



more Photo Credits

Mark van-S was assisted by John Hallingsworth · Hair by Dan Nguyen · Necklaces by Todd Tyarm



M2: That need for solitude ties into Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*, one of your favorite books.

SM: I continue to read it over and over. It's funny, I still haven't finished it [*laughs*]. There's something that resonates really strongly in Rilke's words. Sometimes I find that he's a bit over the top, a little too dramatic and romantic—I've become a little too sensible as I've gotten older—I love his sentiments, the way he words things... how things in Paris "echo and tremble differently than they do in the country."

M2: Are your paintings and drawings another doorway?

SM: When I was making *Fumbling*, I went a little crazy because I was living in this cottage by myself in the woods for seven months and it was winter, about minus 35 degrees Celsius every day. It was just hellishly cold, and I regressed to animal form. I went a little nuts. I had just come off of the road again from a year of touring and had been with people 24 hours a day. To go from that to complete nothingness, to complete solitude was just such a shock. I freaked out and started painting because I couldn't write anything but my brain was going nuts. I had all these thoughts and ideas whirling around and no outlet for them. They wouldn't come out in the music and I couldn't sleep, I couldn't eat. Painting completely lulled me and put all the craziness into a sort of focus.

M2: So the writing process was a kind of metaphysical journey?

SM: In feeling so connected to nature I tapped into something great. It made me realize how incredibly tiny I was in comparison to the universe, but at the same time I felt really connected to it and really important in it, and it gave me a real freedom. I didn't edit myself. I just let things flow. I have never felt so strong or so in touch with everything as at that point. I'm there again, but at a really different level. I'm writing tons of music now, just no words. Maybe it's going to be an instrumental. [*laughs*]

M2: Your artwork reminds me of Gustav Klimt.

SM: Yeah. He's one of my favorite painters. Beautiful. Decadent. Very fantasy-oriented.

M2: Do you see your music as "beautiful, decadent and fantasy oriented?"

SM: [*laughs*] I'd like to see it as beautiful. I rely strongly on the mood of a melody to bring across certain emotions and I'm terribly drawn towards beautiful melodies and melodies of mourning and yearning.

SICKO FANTASIES AND OTHER B-SIDES

M2: In "Full of Grace" your voice takes on such momentum, it almost becomes a wail.

SM: That's one of the most depressing songs I've written to date. I had just been through a really hard time with the person that I was with, sort of coming to an end and neither of us really wanted to admit it—it was really hell on both of us. That song came out of that feeling of sinking. You know: I don't know how to get out of this and neither does the other person, but it's just horrible—it's swallowing us both up whole.

M2: So in that cottage you connected to all the beauty, but what about the flip side—the Jungian shadow?

SM: That duality is another thing I'm drawn to. When I say I love beautiful and decadent things, I also mean I find incredible beauty in very ugly things. I like to mirror that in songs sometimes since my songs deal mostly with people and their psyches. What brought them to this. "Possession" is the most obvious example...

M2: Of a darker side?

SM: Yeah, but if you just listen to the song, it sounds like a love song.

M2: It sounded like a rape song to me.

SM: Well, yeah. [*laughs*] It is. It has those implications. I fought long and hard with myself of how to write a song like this. It really frightened me that I could write something like this. Does that mean I have that in me? I think we all have that kind of violent streak in us somewhere whether we choose to acknowledge it or not. And we've all been obsessed about someone or something, so I decided to be like a novelist. They write about rape and murder and killers all the time and get away with it. I am that person the whole time. I am that man that wants to go out and possess this person so badly that they would do anything to get them. But in a sense I saved myself in the last verse by saying it will only really exist in my dreams. I'll never really act on this.

M2: A definite eroticism of violence.

SM: I had a few obsessed fans who were writing me a lot of letters based on this romantic, sexual fantasy world that I wasn't in, but they believed me to be there with them. Writing "Possession" appeased me—it was just sort of a sicko fantasy in my brain that wouldn't go any further.

FIGMENT-I-ZATION

M2: Some of your fans see you as this generation's folk siren, almost luring people with your music.

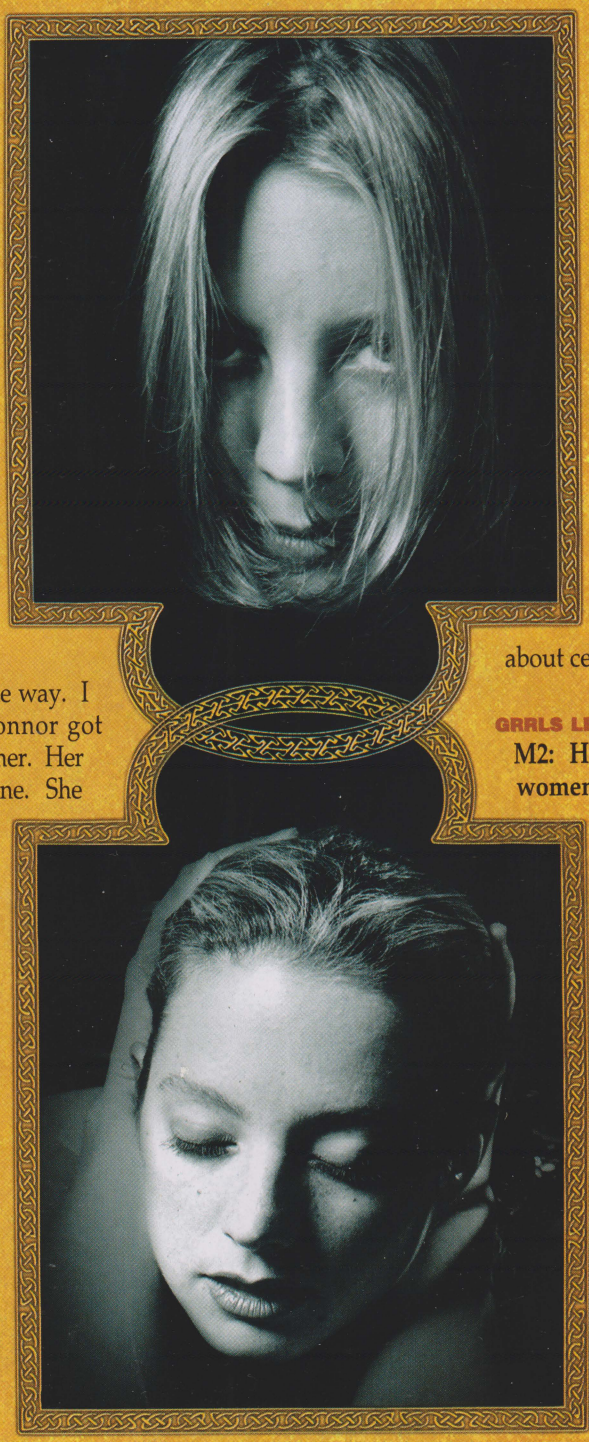
SM: That's something that's instilled by the image monsters, by the media, by people's imaginations. I'm living a lot of people's dreams. I'm a fantasy creature.

M2: Are you afraid you might lose yourself in

fame, be walking down the street and just disappear like Salinger's Holden Caulfield?

SM: [*laughs*] I think I'm too level-headed for that. I got sucked into it when I was about 23 when Solace was taking off. I definitely really dug the fame thing. But it got out of hand pretty quickly and I just wanted to be by myself again. That door is opened, and if I continue down the path I'm on, it's not going to stop. I have to find a way to put it somewhere and deal with it, not let it take me over. I'm really lucky with the people I've surrounded myself with. I'm just me. I don't put on any airs and if I do, I get smacked in the face pretty quick.

It's weird. It's like I don't have any angst anymore



I'm so happy, I'm so zenned out and content —I have nothing to write about

FICKLENESS AND OTHER GUISES

M2: You've grown up under the public eye, once removed through the veil of your music. What is it like to have your personal development on display?

SM: I became famous in a really gentle way. I didn't get famous like Sinead O'Connor got famous—who I really look to as a teacher. Her album came out just a little before mine. She was very opinionated, and God forbid, she changed her mind. The media just dumped on her. Same with Courtney Love who is always in the public eye and seems to feed off that. I'm quite the opposite. I don't want to be written about. I don't want to have my picture in the paper. I just like my own quiet little life. I would have liked it to go on that way. The little bit of fame I had was great, it fed my ego. It still is nice actually, because I'm still not a media darling. I can walk down any street and be recognized by hardly anyone.

M2: Tell me about the guises you shroud yourself in.

SM: A lot of it has to do with revealing some things, but not everything. I want to keep some parts secret. Often I'll put on another character and say things, but under the guise of somebody else. I can always go back and say that it wasn't me.

M2: Put down another veil.

SM: Yeah. As far as image goes, one of the people I respect and admire most is Annie Lennox. She is continually playing with her image, but it's always done so tastefully. I have great respect for her. For the first two or three years of my career, I was billed as this wispy waif. Maybe it was the nice soft dresses and the soft focus. It really stayed with me for awhile. Almost to the point of being reactionary, I tried to be gross.

M2: In being honest you had to be a contradiction.

SM: Exactly. That reminds me of Sinead O'Connor. She just got shat on by everybody. Here's a 21-year-old who's speaking out really loudly about all these heavy social and political issues, and then a couple months later completely contradicts herself. Because she's speaking in a public forum, she wasn't allowed to change her mind. I learned from her that I was going to keep my mouth shut about certain things 'cause I *know* I'm fickle.

GRRLS LEADING GRRLS

M2: Have you found yourself a role model for women?

SM: The amount of teenage girls at the show the other night was unbelievable. Probably about 80 percent girls under the age of 19. It was really great though because it was a celebration of women in music: me, Paula Cole, Lisa Loeb, Emmylou Harris, and Michelle McAdorey. A total girlie extravaganza.

I've always tried to be non-gender specific in my music, and to be seen not as a woman musician, but as a musician. It's just a word game with the media. Where I feel my responsibilities lie is not really gender specific either. I have a responsibility to human beings first and foremost. I think that way first. But I'm starting to come more into the whole notion of being a woman—what that means and what those responsibilities are. Most of my friends at the show had tiny babies. My dressing room became a day care center. There were four women exposed with little babies hanging off of their breasts.

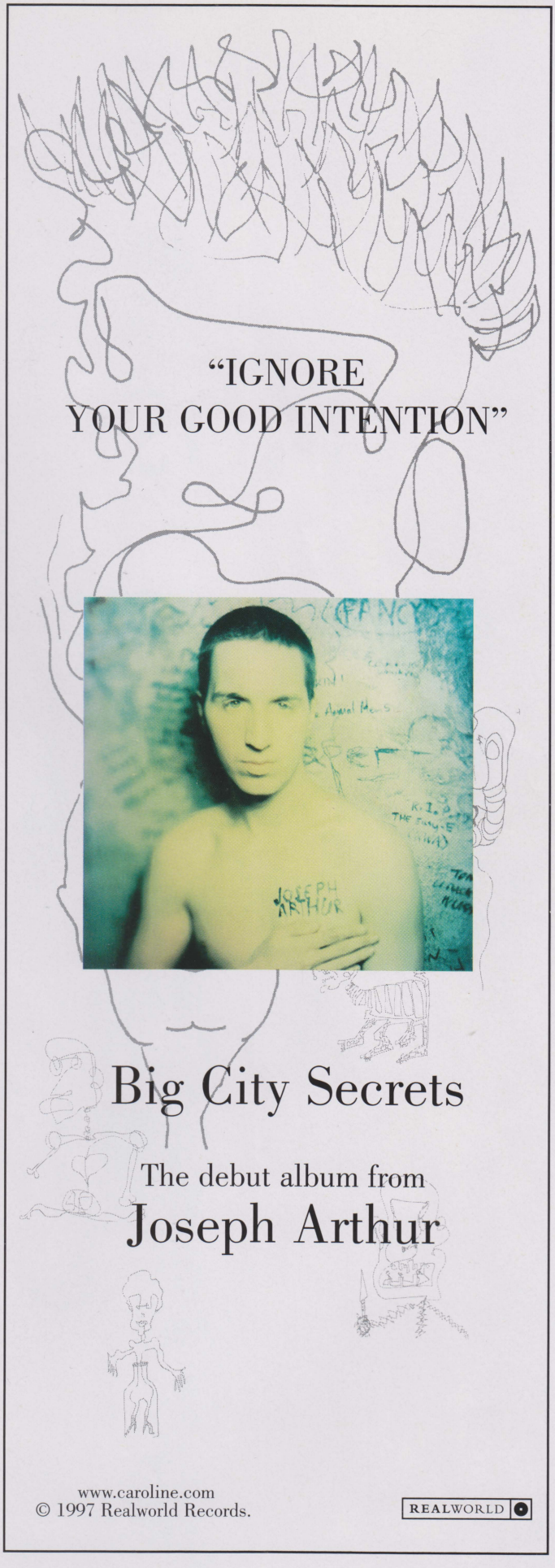
M2: Did that get you thinking?
SM: I just thought it was so beautiful, such a calm from the storm outside. There's a great responsibility right there. I haven't delved into that one yet. We did get a puppy. We figure if we can handle a puppy then maybe we can handle children. [*laughs*]

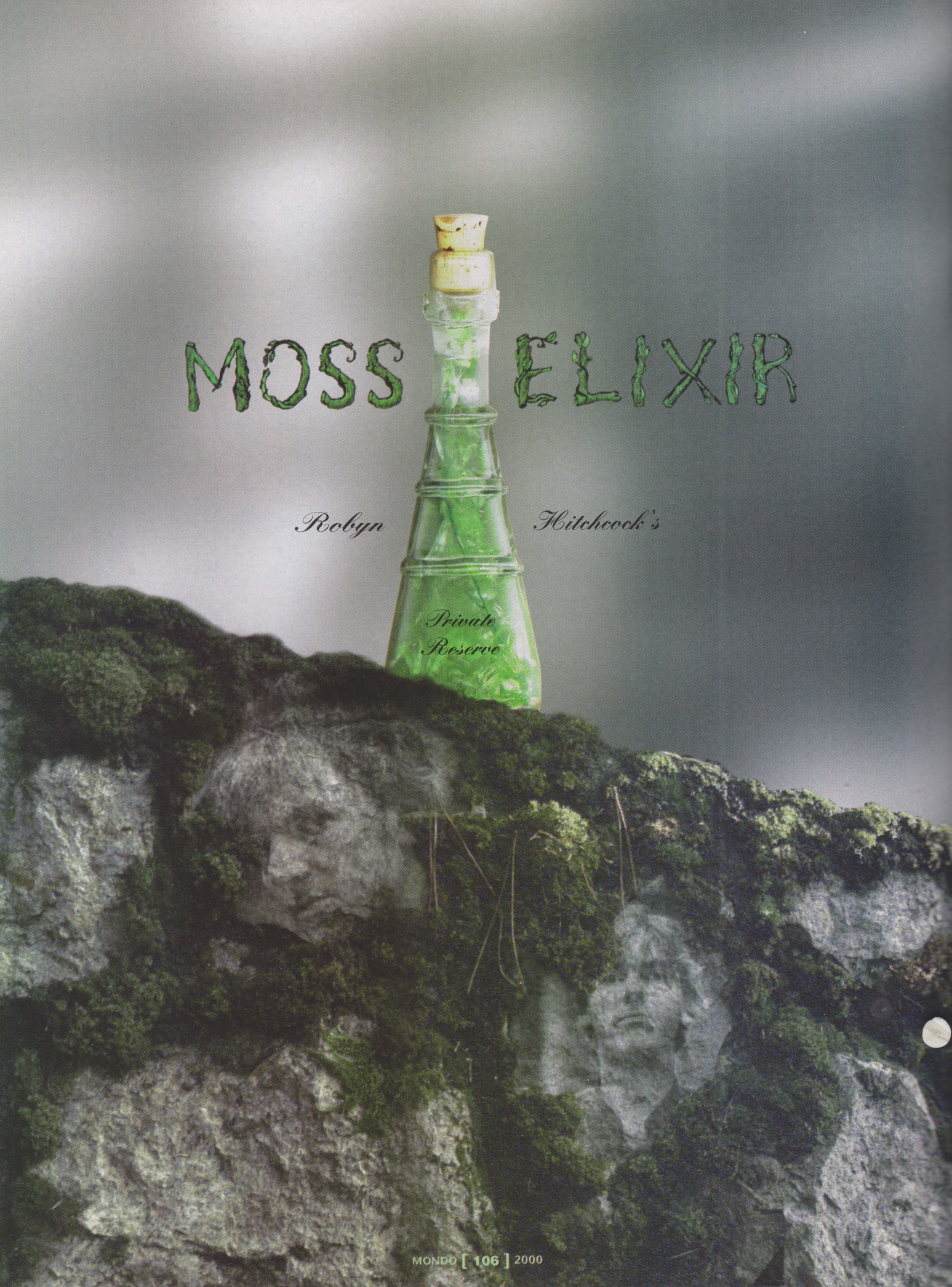
RANTING CYBER-SOCIAL MORONS

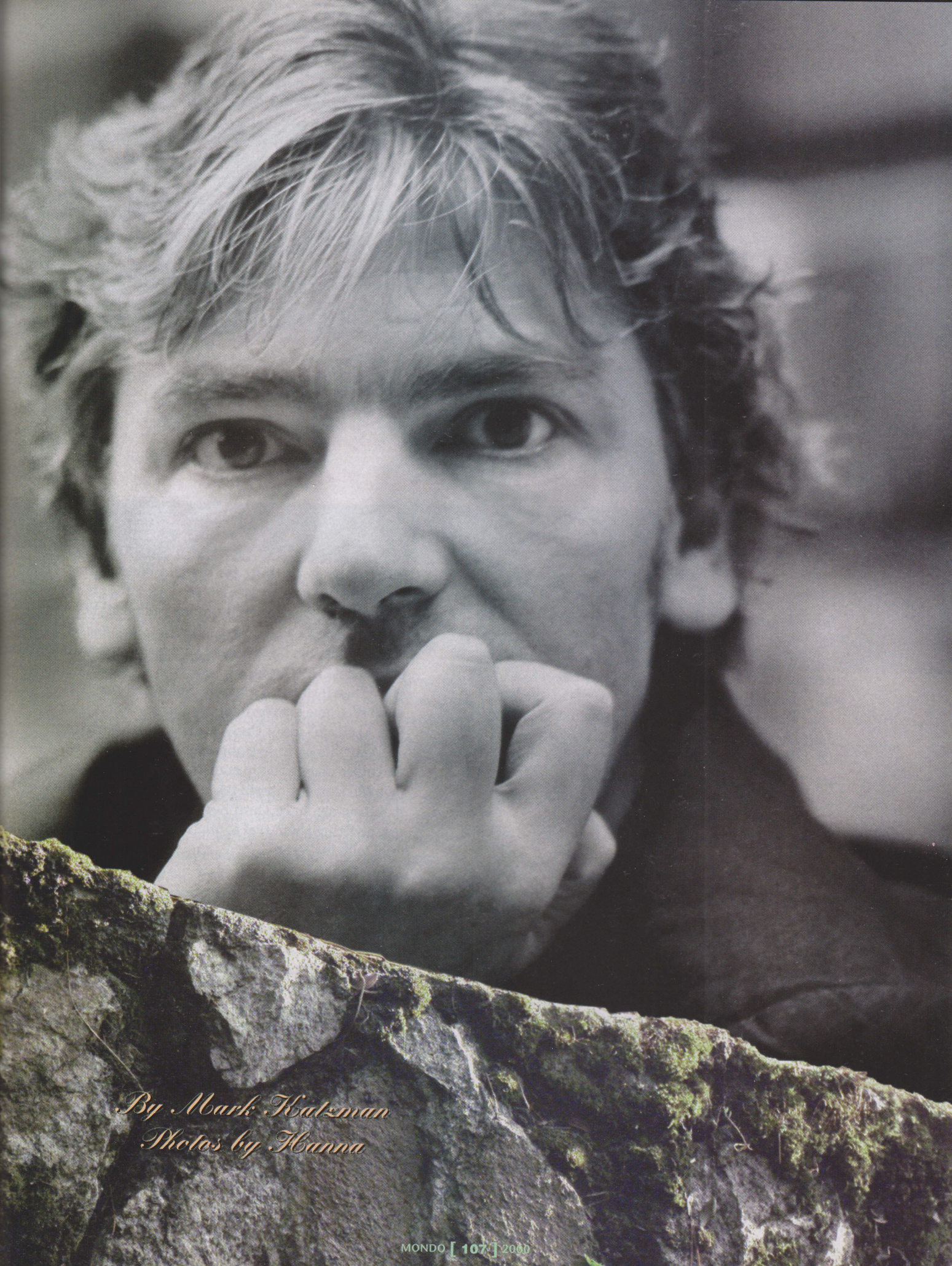
M2: You've become quite techno-savvy with your on-line chats and multimedia disk releases.
SM: Yes and no—to the extent that I talk and someone punches in my answers. I'm a terrible typist.
M2: Does the computer bring you closer to your fans or is the cyber-connection somewhat hollow?
SM: Some of both. Unfortunately the last couple times I've done those on-line chats, I've had someone over my shoulder saying "20 seconds per question, there's 160 questions waiting." I'd rather answer 20 questions well than 100 questions flippantly. I was really pressured to answer only the really simple questions, which defeats the purpose. People were asking really good questions, but they were questions that, because I rant, need to be answered in length. I found I couldn't really do that too well in the cyber-chats. I ended up rounding a lot of corners that I wish I didn't have to.
M2: The medium kind of takes over.
SM: I find it fascinating, from a technology end, that you can do that. It's amazing, that kind of connection. I think I steered away from technology and computers as long as I did because of the sense of... I'd be talking to people at Nettwerk and they would say, "I e-mailed so and so and they haven't e-mailed me back yet." And they were sitting a few desks apart! Instead of talking to each other, they e-mailed each other. This is going to breed cultural and social morons. When you meet people face to face, you won't be able to talk to them.
M2: The global village as an iceberg.
SM: Yeah. You won't be able to communicate one on one. I mean, that's obviously a rather extreme idea, but it seems kinda scary because communication is already so fucked. In other ways it's amazing, if you can go online with someone in Russia and ask them about their garden, that's great. But I find certain elements of it a bit disturbing too. There's a control factor too. Everyone glued to these machines. They're our lifelines, you know? You carry around your iron lung.

IN THE I OF THE STORM

M2: You seem very happy.
SM: I love my life right now. I'm very happy. I wouldn't mind being a little more prolific. I'm surprisingly unneurotic about it though, which is unlike me.
M2: And you don't feel a need to whip up those neuroses to get some words out?
SM: No. You know, I don't want to bring trauma on my house. I'm not interested. I want to find a way to do it in the place I'm in. Bottom line is you can almost count on some crazy thing happening in your life. This sort of calm can only go on for so long before the roller coaster begins again. I'm just enjoying it while it lasts. I'm sure something will happen that will rock my world, that will be less than rosy. 'Cause there's lots of shit out there, that's for sure. M2




MOSS ELIXIR
Robyn Hitchcock's
Private Reserve



By Mark Katzman
Photos by Hanna

***Moss Elixir,* Robyn Hitchcock's new CD, isn't Hitchcock unplugged, no siree. This is Hitchcock *unguarded*, bringing us unforgettable melodies and core human emotions from that strange Hitchcockian zone, way on the other side of the looking glass. Through the thicket of indies, the A&M years, and an increasing number of retrospectives and compilations, Hitchcock has been the most provocative and novel singer/songwriter/guitarist in England for as far back as any of us have neurons to remember.**

His working motto for this suite of songs was "add only what's necessary." There would be no sugar-coated production. This would be a "real" record, i.e. a *Hitchcock* record.

Along with *Moss Elixir*, Warner gave Hitchcock an "apéritif," as he

Welcome to Everything

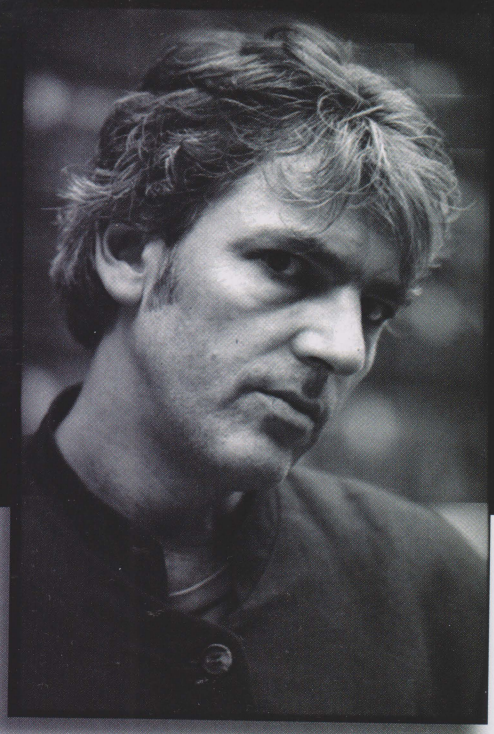
M2: The songs on *Moss Elixir* strike me as deeper, more emotional, than your earlier stuff.
RH: They ought to be. This is a much more tender album than some of the previous ones. I'm more interested in the melody. The words are out of focus, really. I didn't even write down the words for the last song, "This Is How It Feels." I just made them up. And I quite like that, 'cause there was no "art" involved.
M2: The song "Heliotrope"… there's quite a story there.
RH: "Heliotrope" is the key to the whole album.
M2: Who's the Cat-Headed Woman?
RH: The essence of "Heliotrope" is that there's this Cat-Headed Woman basking on a tombstone. And under the tombstone is this dead gun-fighter. He's British and so uptight that he's been unable to decay. His molecules are all held together by tension. He's dead but he can't rot. She's up there sunbathing, doing all the things that he can't. But they gradually begin to empathize and feel each other's sensations. So, in some way, he's down there and he's receiving the sun through her, and she, in turn, can feel the chilliness coming up from his dead-but-unyielding body. In the end, she eats him, but it's entirely pleasurable.
M2: Where did the phrase "moss elixir" originate?
RH: I was trying to describe what the essence of my self or my songs were to my girlfriend. And I said, you know, "like a kind of green fluid in a little beautiful old bottle." And she said, "Oh, you mean moss elixir." She coined the phrase. So that became the code name for the album. Then I wrote the story.
M2: You've got a thing for the Old West and metaphysical cowboys.
RH: Well, he was originally gonna be Bo Diddley. Either Bo Diddley or Hendrix. But he's just a black Sheriff. I suppose there weren't very many of them, but there should have been.
M2: When the Sheriff gives the fellow the elixir he says "Welcome to everything."
RH: That's the idea. This guy drinks moss elixir and suddenly his Third Eye opens and he begins to see into other people and to empathize with them, and then Milo and the Sheriff take off their hats and reveal that they, too, have Third Eyes. But the album isn't proselytizing about that at all. The story was meant to fit with the record.

Open Mike Night for Paintings

M2: In the song "De Chirico Street," you've got a hyena popping out of nowhere and fingers turning into flies and such, which reminded me of De Chirico's remarkable paintings. I wanted to read you a quote from him: "We must not forget that a picture must always be the reflection of a profound sensation, that profound signifies strange, and strange signifies not-known or perhaps entirely unknown."
RH: Yeah. Well, he certainly managed to do that [*laughs*]. His pictures generally gave you the sensation of something about to happen. Or of a frozen moment… everything compressed. If there was no time, there would be no death and no birth. You'd just have this one instant forever. You could get that from a De Chirico. You feel that the instant is about to unfreeze, but it

calls it, by simultaneously releasing an extremely limited vinyl LP, *Mossy Liquor (Outtakes and Prototypes)*, consisting of alternate versions of six tracks from the CD, new songs, along with some lovely solo acoustic work.

Still displaying his playful sense of whimsy, the support tour included a special Isle of Wight trip in classic buses, stopping to perform on cliff-sides.



won't. It's like an ice cube that never melts.

M2: Unlike, Dali, say, who used symbols deliberately, De Chirico's choices were supposedly unintentional. What's your approach to painting? Do you simply leap into the unknown?

RH: My stuff is never intentional. I look at the canvas or piece of paper and what suggests itself to me is what I draw or paint. And the same with song writing. I never try to make a point. A point might find itself being made, but I don't start from that. It's the same as a dream. You don't decide what to dream before you go to bed.

M2: William Burroughs calls painting "evocative magic."

RH: So is music. It's a form a prayer. I think all art is a form of prayer. Either you're summoning something up or you're trying to exorcise something. You want to get rid of it or you want to bring it in. Maybe art is midway between dream and prayer. There's an adequately pretentious quote for you.

M2: Will there ever be a touring exhibition of your paintings?

RH: Well, if I could get sponsored by Budweiser [*laughs*] to have a traveling art exhibition with roadies... That was my original plan: to have the paintings tour clubs, have roadies put monitors and microphones in front of them. And people could go around and clap in front of them. I could play piano in the corner all night and we could hand around white wine. I'd insist that everybody wear white.

But I think I might just make them into shirts. 'Cause I think my paintings actually look better reproduced than they do in real life. They looked very nice in *Ray Gun*. I'm not a very good painter. I'm much better at drawing but I just like painting.

Third Eye Openings

M2: Are you still gloomy about the prospects for the human race?

RH: Yeah, but I'm not gloomy about my life at all. I think it's kind of insulting to go around despising your life. It insults all those whose lives are much worse than yours. You know, you think of Kurt Cobain who was in a position that millions of people would love to be in. To be a good-looking adored artist—which of course was unbearable. But people don't see it like that. And when he blew himself away, he blew away all their desires and goals. He was rubbishing their dreams.

M2: What about the notion of the human species being operative for something like one-tenth of one percent of all evolutionary time on Earth?

RH: Unlike the Trilobite and the Brontosaurus that didn't even know what their names were until sixty million years after they'd left. Humanity is a doubled-edged virus, because as you said, we've been here for only a thumbnail of eternity in terms of time. We've moved dangerously fast. It doesn't look too hopeful. That's why, you know, I seriously think that there's got to be an evolutionary change, a physical change in us, if we're going to adapt. I don't think that we can carry on like this.

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M2: Would you care to speculate?
RH: There are several possible scenarios. One is that we'll replace ourselves just before we become extinct. The race toward artificial intelligence is the race against our own self-destruction. Will we succeed in replacing ourselves before we destroy ourselves?

Another scenario is that we will actually change physically. We need a lot more empathy for the world to function. The world is full of lonely poisonous individuals who can't feel for each other. If our Third Eyes opened, which is what I had in the story, you would start to be able to feel each others' sensations and then nobody would go hungry and nobody would be in pain because everyone else in the tribe would have to tend to them because they would feel that as their own pain and hunger. In other words, you'd have a much more sympathetic, empathetic world. I can't believe that legislation or religion or doctrine will ever salvage humanity. I think we just keep on making the same mistakes 'cause of our nature. So maybe something radical will happen to open our Third Eyes, in twenty or thirty years time.

When we change, all our art will become irrelevant because it's the work of tortured lonely individuals who are trapped in themselves. When the Third Eye opens. we won't have that kind of loneliness. Maybe there'll be a few exceptions, but I can't believe people will understand Shakespeare anymore, 'cause they won't be in that kind of pain.

Time Traveling

M2: If you had a time-travel machine, where would you go?
RH: I think I'd go into the future, because it would be very interesting. I think I might go for about two hundred years to see whether any of the long-term things that need to be implemented, had. You know, was there actually more racial integration or had they just brutally made the whole country into a slave culture? Did Britain ever manage to drag itself out of the Imperial Age? Had they got rid of the internal combustion engine yet? Things like that.

My Mom—The Multitrack Thinker

M2: Have you been writing prose for a long time?
RH: Yeah. In fact, I'm supposed to be doing a book of short stories. When I've finished the next album. I'm maybe even going to go on a holiday to write so that next year I'll finish a bunch of stories and there'll be a book out.
M2: Didn't your father, Raymond, also write?
RH: Well, his best stuff was never published. He didn't have much of a knack for public relations. But he wrote

about Merlin coming back, and when Stonehenge is made invisible by the MI-6. There's one where a new god puts everyone's sex organs in their armpits. There's another one where a woman gives birth to a rubber tire and another one where everybody lives in an abandoned aircraft or something. A bit like J.G. Ballard. People would say, "Is this stuff for kids or is it science fiction or satire or what?" It wasn't satire at all. It was just Raymond letting his mind run.

M2: Imagination must have had a free rein in your household growing up.

RH: My mother has a sort of multi-track mind as well. She's sort of 4-track head and any one channel—or maybe it's 8-track by now—she pushes up the fader and you see what's going on that one track and then, quite suddenly, she'll push up another one and there's a parallel or semi-relevant line of thought going on. You don't know which track is going to come next. You never get them all at once. They were probably quite confusing people to grow up with, really.

Dylan—Career Counselor

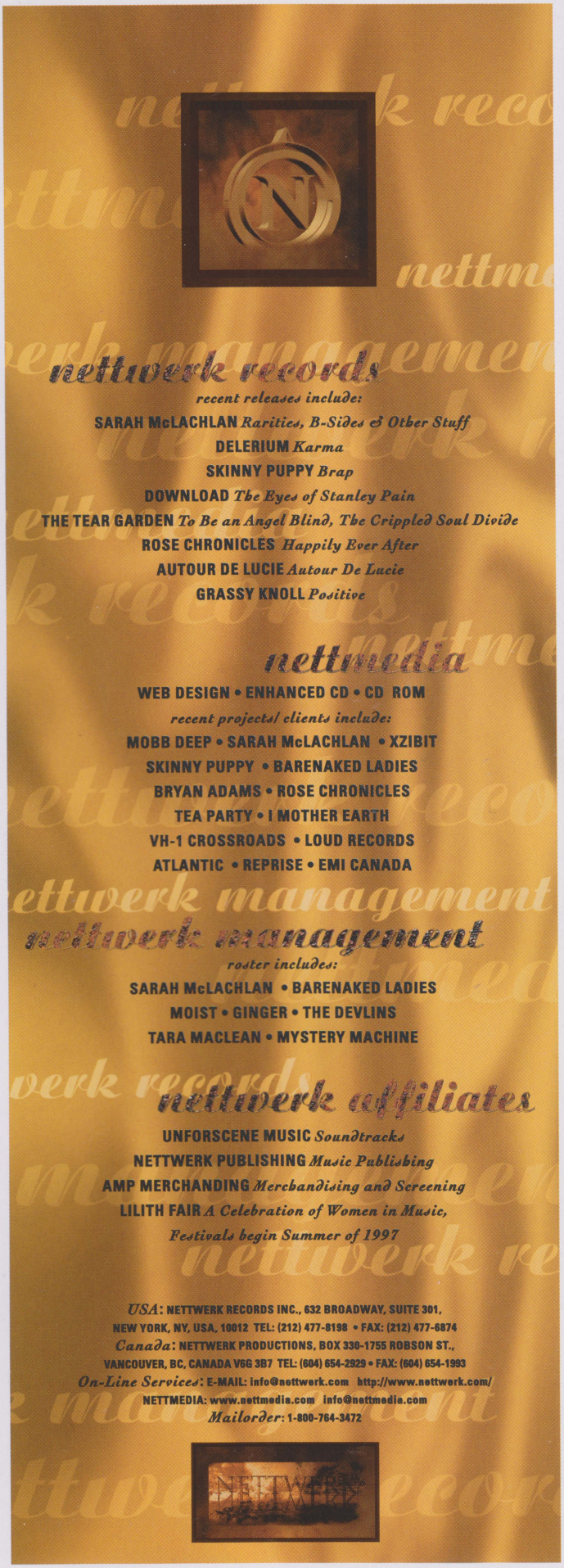
M2: Do you recall the first time you heard Dylan?

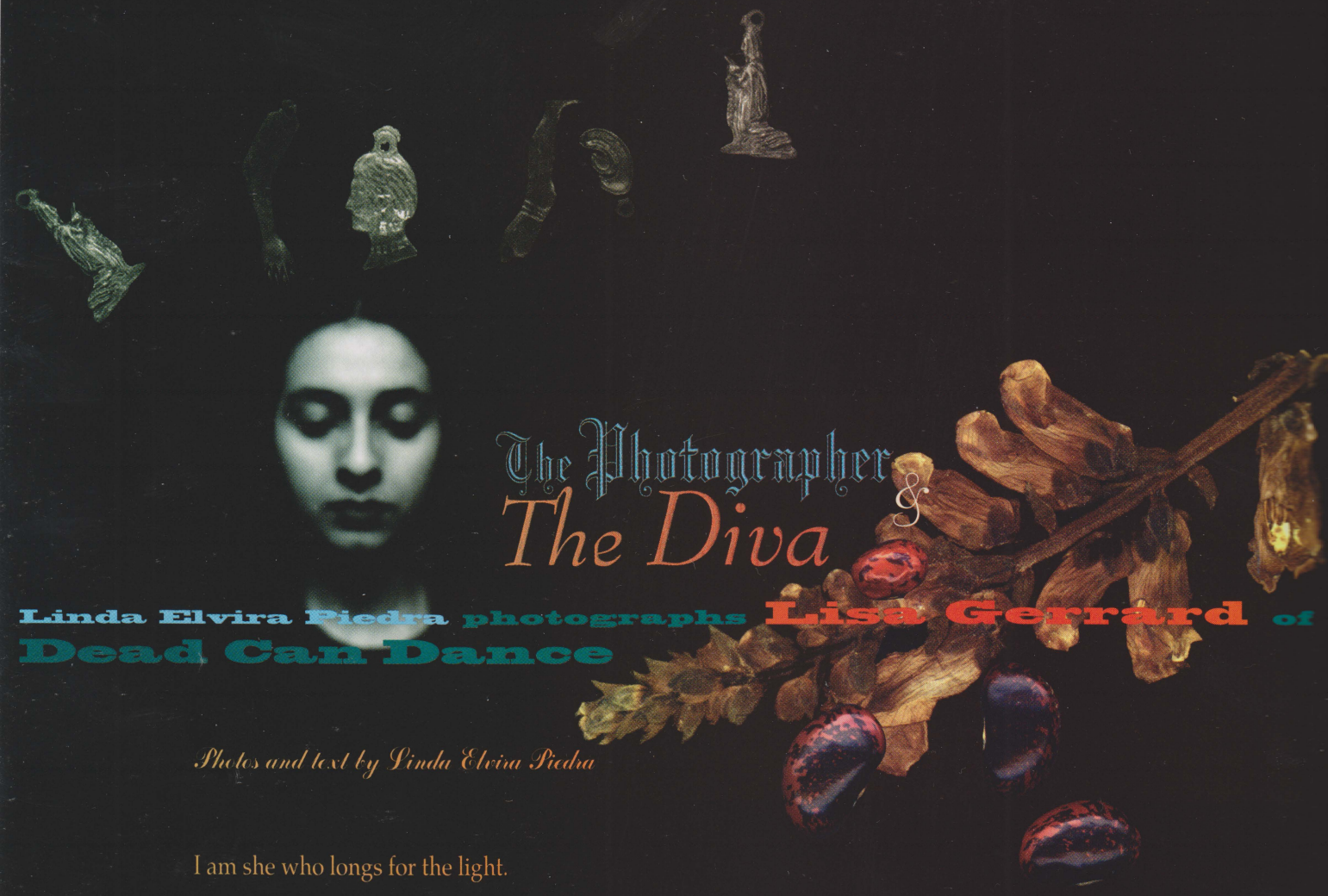
RH: It was at boarding school. Every day that term I heard "Like a Rolling Stone." They put it on the juke-box in the house I was in. And then somebody put on *Highway 61* itself. I remember sweeping up the floor listening to "Desolation Row." And that was it. That decided what I was going to be. I thought it was "Destination Roll," in fact. [*laughs*]

M2: I can envision you as an old man singing in a little pub somewhere.

RH: I can see myself as an old man singing in a pub quite easily, if not in a concert hall. Probably somewhere between the two. 'Cause I was never a pop singer. It's not something I have to rely on, being young and sexy. It's just that there was nothing else I wanted to do and I wanted to do this very badly. I'm encased by my adolescent dreams. I can paint and write or make films, but my main obsession remains music. I'm doing this because a teenage Robyn Hitchcock wanted to. I'm set on a course that a very young and inexperienced but very determined me decided. It was my dream. And gradually it slipped out of my dream and it became my life, ya know? M2

Some bloke told me you can catch the solo Hitchcock playing Tuesday nights at the 12 Bar Club in London. Later this year he'll be co-headlining in the States with Billy Bragg.





The Photographer & The Diva

Linda Elvira Piedra photographs Lisa Gerrard of Dead Can Dance

Photos and text by Linda Elvira Piedra

I am she who longs for the light.

I followed a lion believing that it was a deer—the deer that was a lion.

Was it a dream or an augury that led me here?

Seven years ago in France—a mystic cycle—I first met Lisa Gerrard.

Fleetingly, furtively I slipped her some beans through the iron palings of a fence.

Magic beans, scarlet, speckled; the ancients thought them to be the abode of the soul.

She gave me a snapdragon. Pressed in a journal it became my talisman,

the constant companion of journeys criss-crossing the globe.

Pentimenti, ports of call, passions spent:

After seven years of wanderlust I bethought myself to return to my people.

It was then that the lion came back to me.

Shortly before I left for Mexico

I was given the signs: the terra cotta full moon, the low, raw voice,

and I was tugged back fiercely, lovingly, to awaken to my work.





I found my family—one of blood, my father's, my grandmother, my cousins; and another of spirit, my friends of Dead Can Dance. Magical souls in a magical land. This time there *were* no iron palings. Lisa said she felt it was no coincidence that the tour should end in Mexico. As a group they were seeing the completion of a cycle by arriving at a place so culturally near the source of their work. A culture steeped in the immanent knowledge of death and transformation. Everywhere one looks are reminders of death-in-life. The festal breads decorated with bones and tears, the *pan de muerto*, skulls made with sugar, the eye sockets stuffed with brightly colored paper, and decorated with sugar filigree, each spelling the name of a dead person. We talked of our losses, irreparable losses, the death of my lover, the tragic death of her brother Mark. *Ruega por su alma.*



The tradition of the Dance of Death celebrates the end of life and guides our passage to the next world. Here, so alone, in darkness, with our little tools, threads and lanterns, we help make that bridge with our living work. This I felt during Lisa's song "Sanvean." That voice is a vessel and that stage an altar for her work. See, too, her eyes and hands, and know that she touches and hugs lovingly. Our friendship is a great gift to me, and in Mexico was a great comfort. She let me stay near to her. We sat long hours talking, drinking coffee and eating apples from my grandmother's garden. We ate *so* many apples, going from the sweetest to most tart. This time was very beautiful; it was a feast. Mexico is so highly colored, so much in blue. I asked my cousin what to call it, and she said, simply, *azul del cielo*. There were the songs of so many birds in the courtyard of the hotel where we ate lunch, the music of Astor Piazolla played in the theater before the concerts of Mexico City, and the concerts themselves: transcendent.

















After the last concert of Mexico City I sat in Lisa's room, waiting for the roadies with whom I would ride up to León. We ate from a mountain of cheese sandwiches that arrived from room service. Lisa took a pillow from her bed and gave it to me, that I might get some rest on my journey, and told me to check into her room at the hotel, as I would arrive before her. And with no problem, like magic, I was checked in as Lisa Gerrard. When she arrived later, she was given a new room, and so there were now two Lisa Gerrards at the hotel. This she found fabulous. It was the last day in Mexico, and Lisa did something very beautiful after that final concert. She brought forward each member of Dead Can Dance and for each one a tremendous cheering and applause rose and soared. And sister and brothers embraced one another in relief, in gratitude, and in celebration. It had ended, gloriously, and they could now go home.



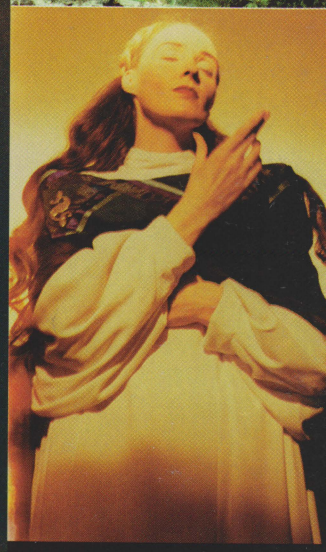






I returned to Mexico City where I was taken in by a friend and left to sleep dreamlessly in a blue room, to awaken softly and slip out quietly. I nearly left my camera behind. I missed my friend Lisa, whose voice and words had sustained me and stayed with me. Suddenly I remembered my dream. A friend had followed me, trying to warn me, pleading with me to turn back. I had not even turned to look at her because I believed she could not understand. The deer was beautiful, and I would follow it. When I believed that the lion was about to pounce and eat me, I turned to her and called: Friend, if he devours me, please don't leave me. I will speak now as a friend: whether in this life or another, I will not leave you, Friend. Even in darkness, I will remain with you, moving by the light of your being, and from your light I am reborn . . . I am your shadow. M2






SPELLS,
SPILLS,
and SPEED





KICK ASS, LEAVE A FOOTPRINT

The more I think about this game, the stranger it becomes. Basically, what we have with Z is a bunch of hard-drinkin', noogie-givin' gun-totin' robotic grunt soldiers dropped into a distant planet's combat zone with orders to kick ass and leave a footprint. (I'm certain that's the *exact wording* on their mission briefs: *Kick Ass and Leave a Footprint*). Z features the kind of real-time strategy action found in games such as *Command & Conquer* or *Warcraft* but focuses on control of battlefield elements rather than the construction of them. The war zone in question is divided into grid squares of territory, and ultimate control of any given area is achieved via a Capture the Flag scheme. Objectives such as factories within these territories create tanks and new robot troops for whomever is in control at the time, resulting in the odd hybrid of a tactical-scale game which begins with a strategic scramble for occupation of territory, not unlike the opening gambits of a chess game. All through *this* chess game, however, your troops in the field radio in to call you an asshole—I'm not kidding—when the military situation starts to degenerate. A few rocky ridges or mesas getting in your way? Just aim the big guns and *tear right through those suckers*, 'cause the nearest EPA rep is seventeen light-years away and *fuck* him if he can't take a joke. Your enemy got all the cool jeeps? No prob—just snipe those boys *pang* right out of the driver's seat and claim your wheels. You get the idea. Z is the Bud Lite alternative to the somewhat more straightfaced strategy games out there, heavy on gameplay if not on military realism *per se*. You can even link up with three of your friends via network or modem and—in the words of Patton, a man who would have fully understood Z—"hold 'em by the nose, and kick 'em in the ass."

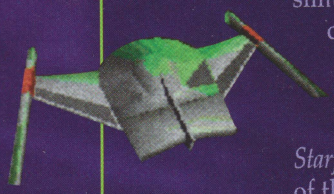
BY CHRIS HUDAK

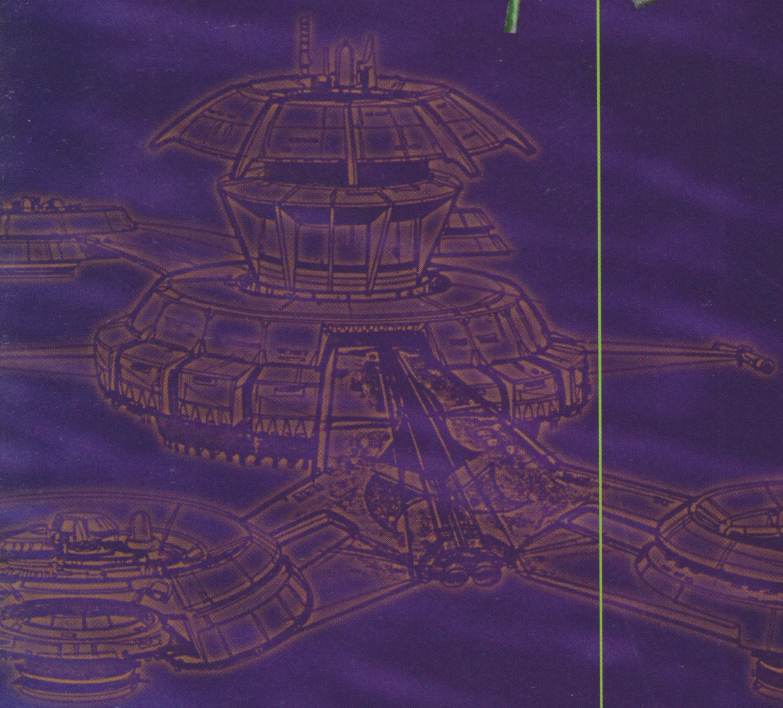


STARFLEET ACADEMY

INTERPLAY







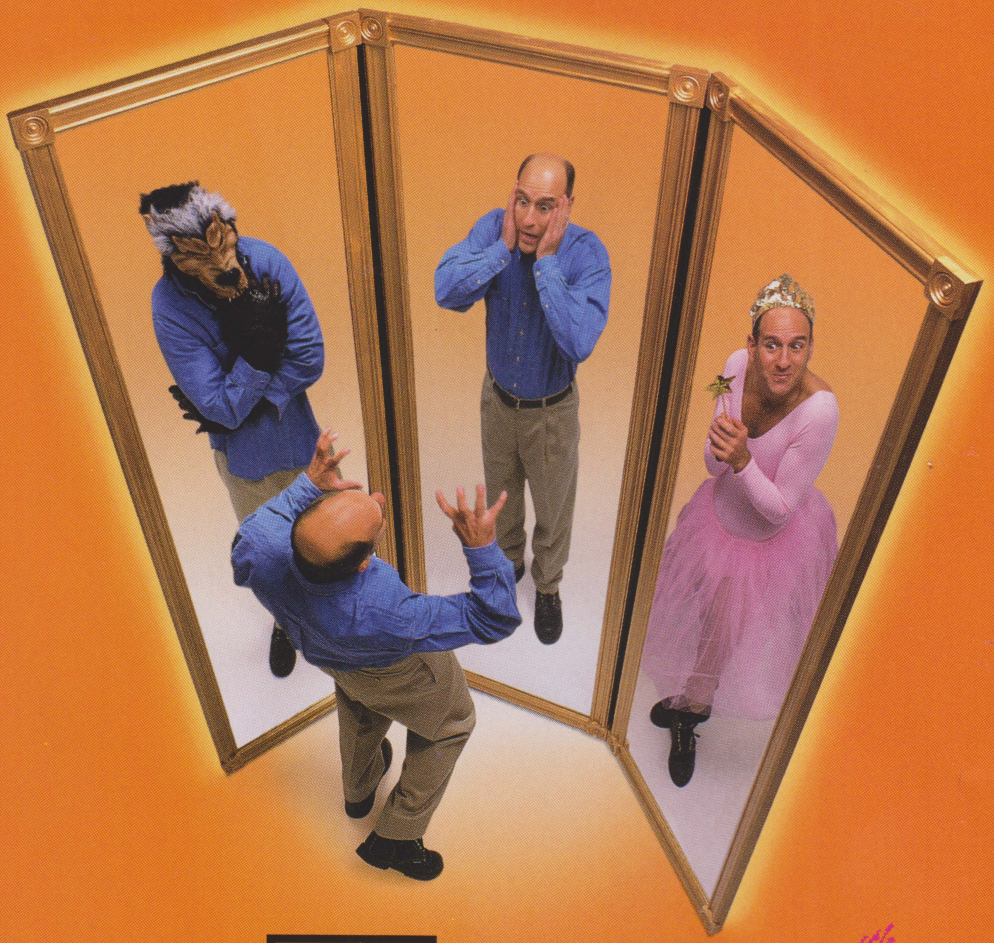
WE COME IN PEACE, SHOOT TO KILL

I've been waiting for this a long time—a straight-ahead space combat sim set in the *Star Trek* universe (the *movie era* universe, by the way, when all the ships were chunky and scary-looking, bleeding-heart counselors didn't have their own seats on the bridge, and "diplomacy" was largely achieved by locking phasers on target). In *Starfleet Academy*, players attend the esteemed institution of the same name—at Starfleet Headquarters, the Presidio, San Francisco—and undergo a series of simulated missions covering all aspects of ship command and combat. Members of the classic *Trek* crew—Shatner, Nimoy and Takei—make cameo appearances via full-motion video, but the real meat of *Starfleet Academy* is in the gorgeous presentation of the ships themselves: Texture-mapped models, ranging in the hundreds of polygons, of everything from Constitution-class ships (i.e., the Enterprise), to Klingon battlecruisers to Romulan Birds-of-Prey (which can fade into wavering, invisible phantoms with the aid of their cloaking devices) to a number of other alien craft including my personal favorites, the punctual, territorial Tholians. Essentially an expanded version of the 3-D combat found in earlier Interplay *Trek* titles, *Starfleet Academy* adds flashy touches inspired by the *Trek* films, such as energy weapons acting as moving light sources as they streak across the bows of their targets, or the ability to cripple enemy ships by shearing off their exposed engines with phaser bursts. The Academy rigors even include the famed Kobayashi Maru scenario, a supposedly unwinnable test of character seen in the movie *The Wrath of Khan*. Captain Kirk, as every *Trek* fan knows, had to cheat to win, which raises some interesting questions for this new product.

BY CHRIS HUDAK



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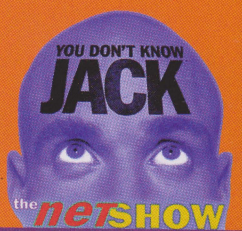
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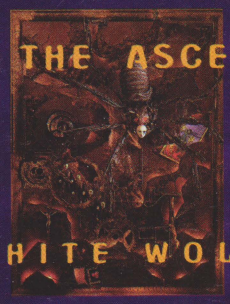
Jellyvision

You must have Windows® 95 to play YOU DON'T KNOW JACK the netshow.

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MAGE: THE ASCENSION



WHITE WOLF

ROCK 'N' ROLE-PLAY

Role-playing games are for LOSERS, right? Role-playing games are for those personality-deficient fanboys who go to *Star Trek* conventions and call Bill Shatner "Captain Kirk" to his face. This is true of all role-playing games. Right?

Well *almost*.

Mage: The Ascension reaches right down into the mystical zeitgeist and pulls out a great burning handful of quirky brilliance. The game, unlike some other role-playing games, takes place in the real world, albeit a slightly darker, Gothic version called "The World Of Darkness."

Mage has a fairly simple premise—that magic is not a bunch of sissies in robes hurling lightning at one another. Magic is, as Aleister Crowley defined it, the art of changing reality through consciousness. The characters in *Mage* are all about giving Reality a degree of fluidity, of motion. Their chief enemy in this is the "Technocracy," the shadowy, all-pervasive organization which seek to keep Reality static.

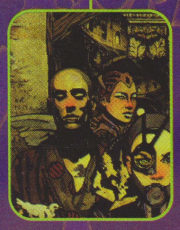
This is a rock 'n' roll role-playing game, a game which draws on such varied sources as Joseph Campbell, Byron, William Gibson and the Sisters of Mercy. As a mage, you must belong to one of nine Traditions, like the Akashic Brotherhood (the Zen-martial-artist-Grasshopper types) or the Euthanatos (the Jack Kevorkians of the New Age) or the Virtual Adepts (reality hackers, literally).

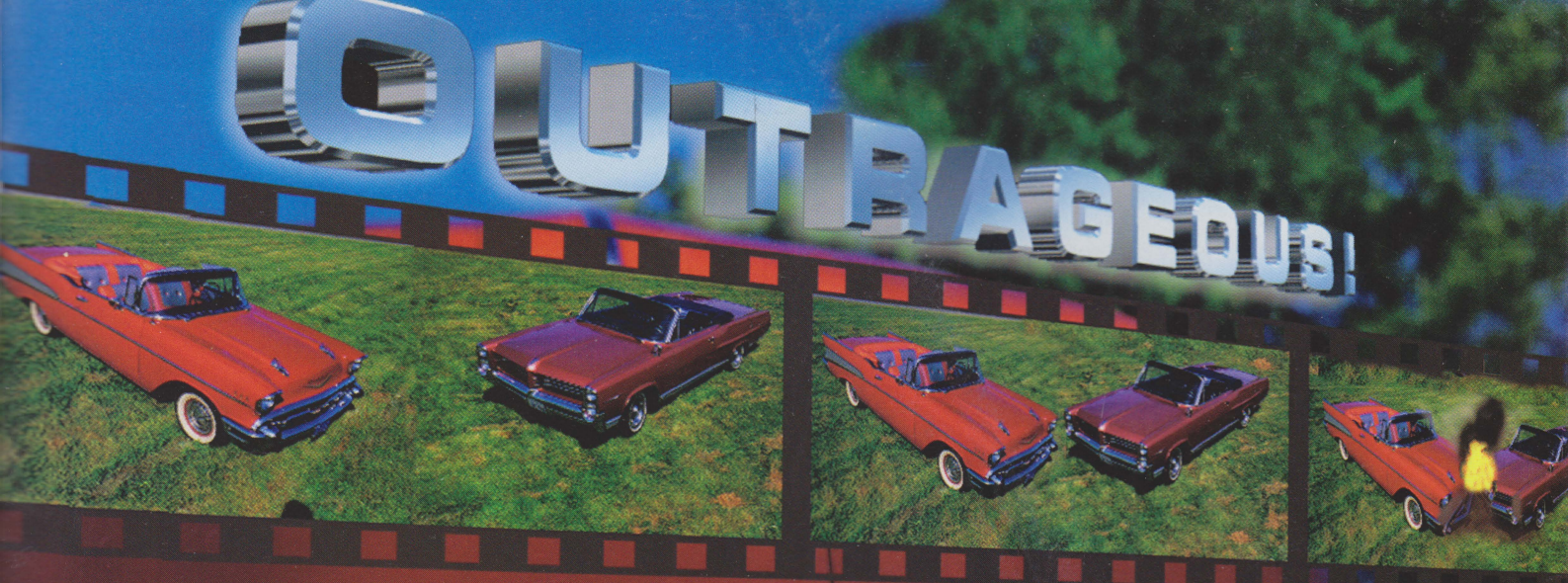
The most astounding thing (at least to me, a veteran of the role-playing psychic wars) is that *Mage* is well-written. No fanboys here—the chief writer, Phil Brucato, is a highly literate, highly intelligent guy and he seems to pick a lot of highly literate, highly intelligent people to work with. Nary is there a mention of barbarians or Swords of Doom in *Mage*; the sourcebooks are chock full of strange philosophy, conspiracy theories, and quotes by everyone from Nick Cave to Geoffrey Chaucer. The game's first rule is that there ARE no rules—one makes this shit up as one goes along. Brucato and his crew of malcontents provide suggestions for gaming, nothing more. It makes for a great evening's entertainment.

One of the things about *Mage* that fascinates me is the way that it taps into the current obsession with mysticism and the paranormal. From *The X-Files* to *ID4* to *The Craft*, the general run of humanity is becoming more and more open to the notion that Reality is not perhaps as solid as we've been led to believe. In fact, one of my only reservations about *Mage* was that it might perhaps be too realistic for the younger set to handle—with its references to Hermetic magicians and real-life conspiracy theories, it could easily trigger some Crowley-wannabe's psychosis. *Mage* is *not* for the kiddies. Definitely. It's also not for those of us who don't have a firm grasp on the world around us. Brucato is quick to point out that, while magick may exist in the world, it bears little resemblance to the world that he and the guys at White Wolf have created.

So, caveats aside, check out *Mage: The Ascension*. It's a gothic-punk look at the hidden corners of the world, the things that go on beyond the sight-lines of everyday life. Slip the surly bonds of Reality, say I, and go out and buy the sourcebook (a beautiful tome, with lots of *Sandman*-like artwork and hip design). It's nice to have a sense of wonder, after all—and if *Mage* doesn't help yours, I'll eat this magazine.

BY JOSH ELLIS





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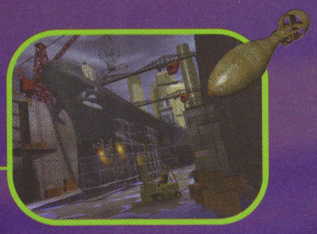
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COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT

WESTWOOD STUDIOS



WARS OF FUTURE PAST

Ten years ago, the only notion weirder than that of the utter, imminent balls-up of the Soviet Union would have been that gamers would end up having so much fun with it.

A "prequel" to the popular strategy game *Command & Conquer*——a prequel set, in fact, in an alternate history wherein Hitler has been "removed" via the machinations of time-travel—*Command & Conquer: Red Alert* focuses on the simultaneously retro yet bizarrely high-tech conflict between the "European Allies" and a Stalinist Soviet Empire in a splinter-universe WWII gone completely nutzoid: Allied forces are headquartered in Berlin; lumbering flatbeds trundle V-2 rockets into battle and lob them about like so many quarter-kiloton Molotov Cocktails; Ivan has managed to work Tesla's designs into massive, lightning-gouting antipersonnel Electricity Coil emplacements; and whichever side manages to capture Albert Einstein may just discover methods of instantly warping groups of tanks and/or soldiers behind enemy lines via temporary but extremely useful hyper-space conduits. If this all sounds just a little bit warped to you, it is. It's also gonna be—mark my words—Strategy Game of the Year, and you can put *that* in your *trubka* and smoke it.

Red Alert improves upon the basic gameplay mechanics found in *Command & Conquer*. The battlefield action is still order-based and real-time, but a wealth of new options has been added:

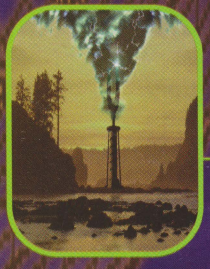
Spies can scope out the current income of refineries or check on decoy installations and appear to the enemy as friendly units (only guard dogs can sniff out your spies, and once they do, somebody had better gun the damned mutt down before it tears your secret agent's throat out).

Engineers can easily (and suddenly… unrealistically… infuriatingly) turn your prospering command base into a house divided—by capturing fully-active installations—and must now take buildings only as their defenses approach a critical state.

Allied spy planes fly terrain-recon sorties to remove those mysterious black gaps of unrevealed terrain from the map while Soviet "Gap Generators" put them right back.

Yak fighter planes, MiG jets and transports full of paratroopers take to the skies; and various assorted pieces of retro-impedimenta such as Chronospheres or "The Iron Curtain" distort the local space-time continuum or render objects molecularly inviolable.

While the multiplayer games are where *Red Alert* can bring out the best—and worst—in computer gamers, solitaire players can now fight up to six AI opponents simultaneously in "skirmish mode." The designers at Westwood clearly wanted to go nuts and have fun with this one. They've even introduced a new and very likeable (if extremely dangerous and mildly psychotic) commando named Tanya, a veritable army unto herself, who gleefully laughs and shouts *"Chew on this!"* into her headset as you command her to snipe enemy troops right out of their boots or slap wads of C-4 to unsuspecting installations. Play the entire conflict as Blue or Red, but in either case I recommend keeping a bottle of vodka handy for the full game experience. M2



BY CHRIS HUDAK

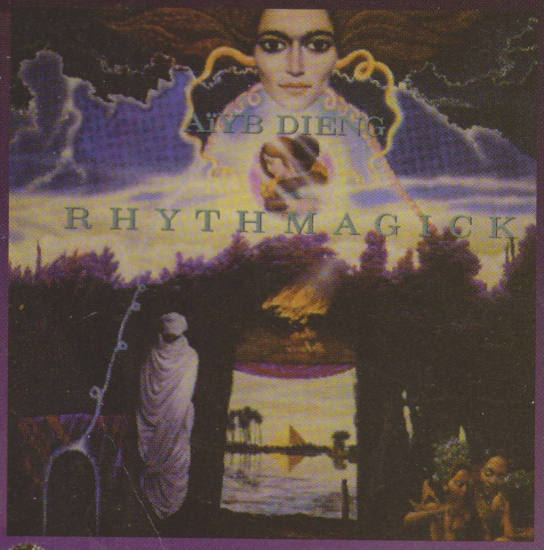
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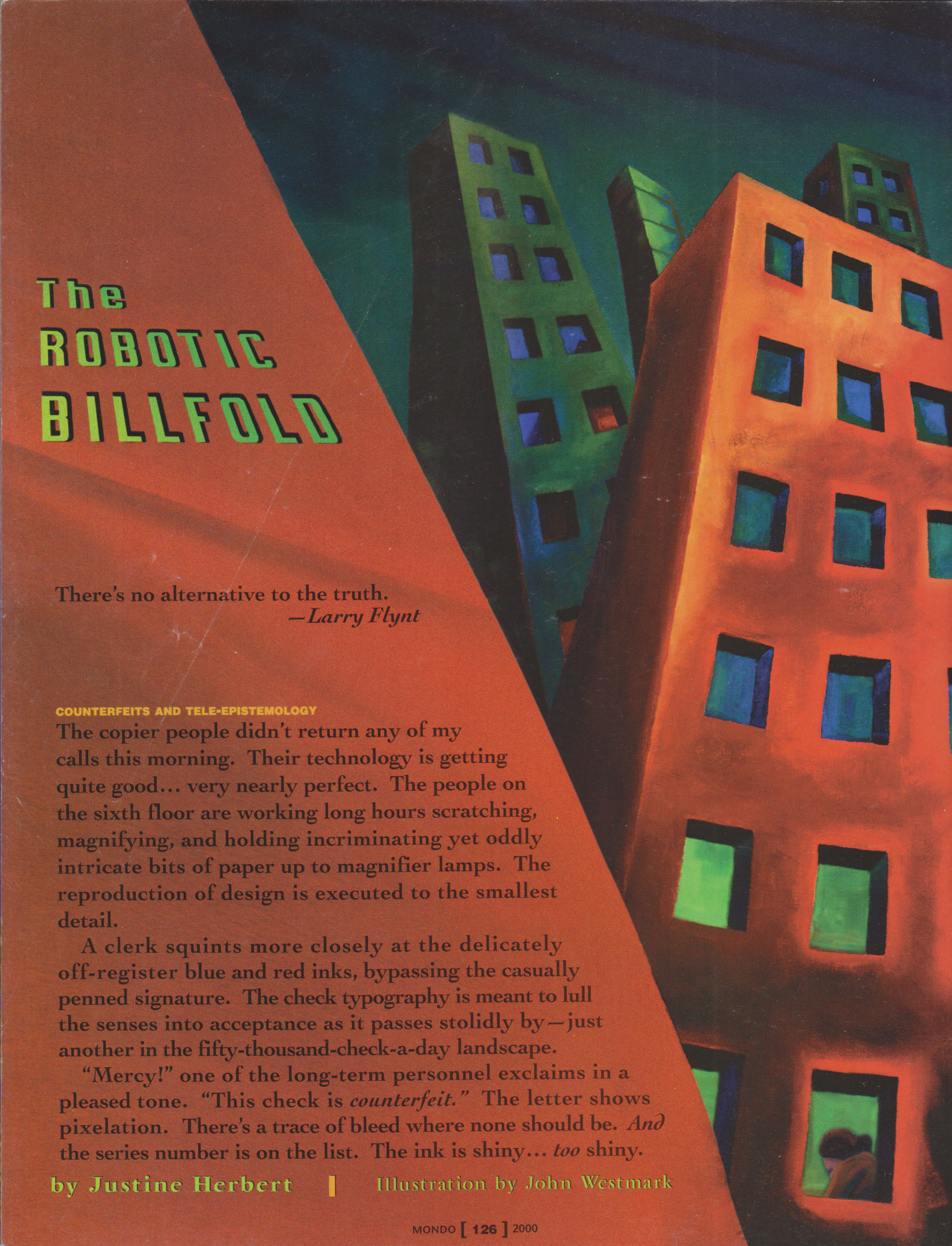
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The ROBOTIC BILLFOLD

There's no alternative to the truth.
—*Larry Flynt*



COUNTERFEITS AND TELE-EPISTEMOLOGY

The copier people didn't return any of my calls this morning. Their technology is getting quite good... very nearly perfect. The people on the sixth floor are working long hours scratching, magnifying, and holding incriminating yet oddly intricate bits of paper up to magnifier lamps. The reproduction of design is executed to the smallest detail.

A clerk squints more closely at the delicately off-register blue and red inks, bypassing the casually penned signature. The check typography is meant to lull the senses into acceptance as it passes stolidly by—just another in the fifty-thousand-check-a-day landscape.

"Mercy!" one of the long-term personnel exclaims in a pleased tone. "This check is *counterfeit.*" The letter shows pixelation. There's a trace of bleed where none should be. *And* the series number is on the list. The ink is shiny... *too* shiny.

by Justine Herbert | Illustration by John Westmark



YOU MEET THE NICEST PEOPLE AT KINKO'S

Counterfeiting used to demand skill and access to printing equipment. But now, it's essentially a copy job. Perfectly good check stock can be ordered from the Sunday paper through personalized check companies. Using a microline (account number) from a large company with sufficient funds, passing these checks is easy.

Counterfeits are the growth area in reproduction technology, fruit of the most democratic access to date—copy stores. Talking to an employee, I can picture all the left-over forgery attempts found in the trash. "I don't know what it was about Austin, Texas, but we would see it all the time, even dollar bills. They'd only keep the ones they could use. After a while it got to be too much. We had to move the self-serve color copiers in back."

As Marge Reilly, counterfeit check supervisor at Wells Fargo attests, high-end copiers produce amazing results. "For the year of 1987, we had two cases. In 1988, six. It didn't get into the hundreds until the 90's. And now we're up to five or six new cases a day."

PEOPLE ARE STILL BOUNCING CHECKS

Outside, the tall, prosperous, upwardly vectored scurry between appointments. It's the Financial District at noon. Inside, on the sixth floor in the Bounced Check Department, we are witness to the sad reality of the morning after.

I work at the Bounced Check and Counterfeit section at Wells Fargo where we get to see the stark and simple truth. Fifty thousand bad checks pass through the office each day, the payees dinged for a bank fee once the check has been through three times. Of course, everything can happen in that lag. The credit can be approved. The bets come in. The rent is paid. The new-car-purchaser exits the country. Float is an essential condition in America, unlike Japan where handing someone a check is regarded as an insult.



100 percent real simulations

Bouncing checks is a daily practice for thousands of American enterprises. Individuals do it as a convenient empty gesture. "For a great time!" reads one notation. Another: "Entertainment for the cruise!" Couples cross each other's names off their joint account and then write each other several thousand dollars in bad checks. Software firms bounce on lawyer's fees. After a few months of observation, it seems every local business —and many national ones (Time Warner?!! eh?)—are cutting it a little close. This feels like the last real job on earth, I think, and also a treasure trove of the last unexploited consumer niche—compulsive bad-check-writers.

The lowest-barrier method of counterfeiting seems to be copying an old paycheck and altering the date. The roadblock here is that the receiving bank has hundreds of companies' current payroll serial numbers on file. So if the number isn't on this list, the cashee stands a good chance of being nabbed in the banking line. But there's always Saturday banking when the main systems can't be accessed. This, concedes Marge Reilly, is a big problem.

PAY THE TROLL

Experimenting with people's attitudes towards counterfeiting, authenticity, and fraudulence has become a hot new area in evolutionary social science. The *Legal Tender* web site, a collaboration between roboticists and researchers, debuted this year at SIGGRAPH. Displaying two $100 bills, it asks the user to determine through a series of tests which is real and which is counterfeit. A tele-robot is ostensibly hooked up to the other end. The user directs the 'bot to poke a hole, perform a burn test, or abrade a small area of the bill. In exchange for all the fun, users have to pay a data fee: giving their names and verifiable e-mail information. More *net-trolling*, troll toll-takers?

Eric Paulos, a 'bot jock and graduate student in robotics at UC Berkeley, confirms that the Legal Tender site is set up as a kind of experiment. "We wanted to see how people react to the site—whether they regard it as real, or as phony as the counterfeit bill that is supposedly displayed. We've gotten a lot of calls from people convinced that there is no robot performing the experiments."

There's also the issue of taking responsibility for the act of defacing U.S. currency. Although the robot is supposedly doing it via remote, the user is implicated. "We wanted to see how people treat the criminality issue also. Whether it bothers them. Whether they regard it as real."

Epistemology (if a tree falls in the forest... etc.) is an issue in *any* net play, so why is it important whether there's really a 'bot involved or not?

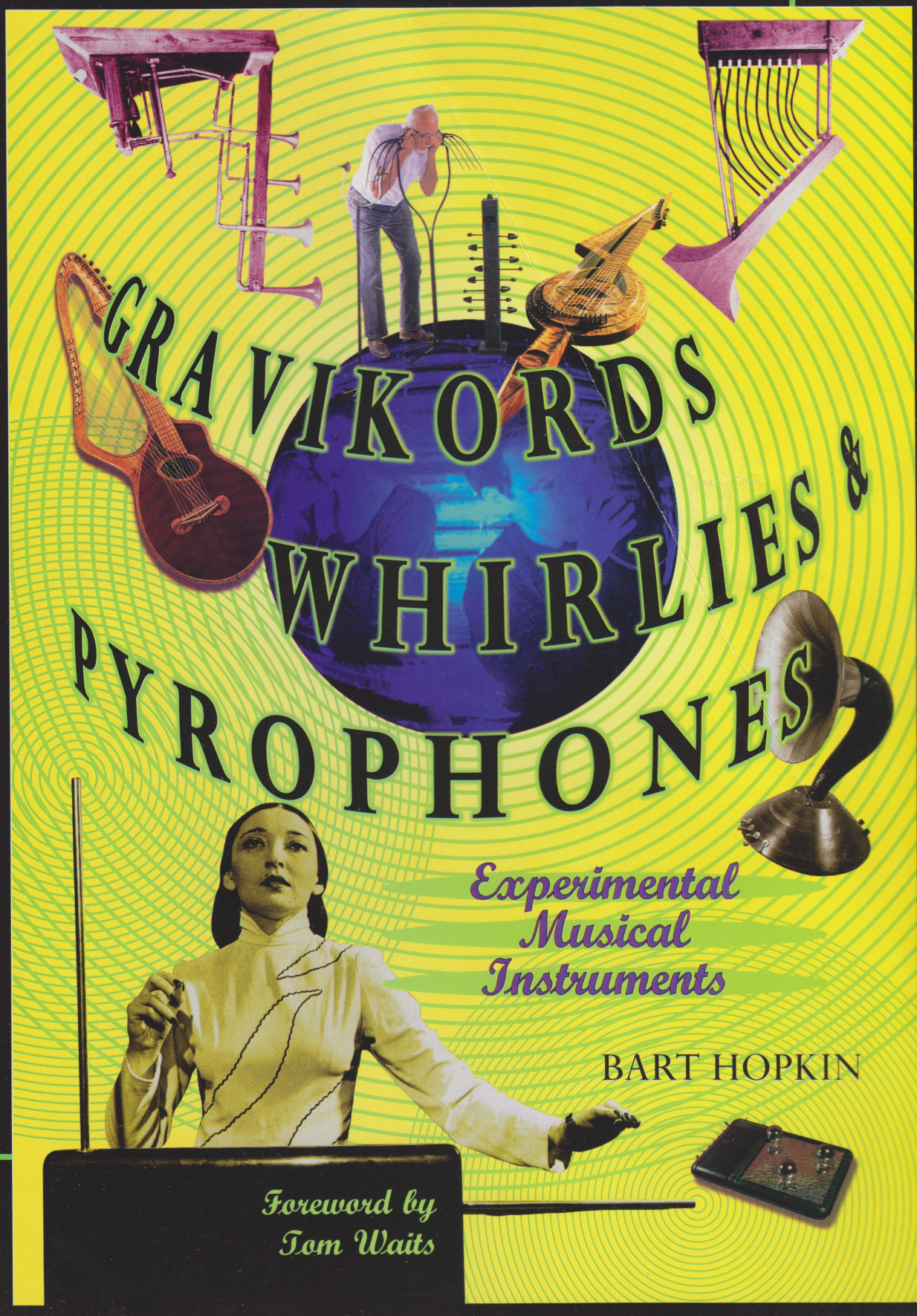
"The problem with authenticity is very important to the art market, commerce on the Net, any kind of money transaction," states Paulos. "In addition, when remote robots are hooked up to systems such as the Net—and they will be—they will be capable of being hacked, and some bad stuff will happen. They could destroy people's property... We wanted to investigate how people react to performing remote actions."

Some interesting people collaborated on this project including: robotics showman Mark Pauline, Judith Donath of MIT Media Lab, graphic designer Will Linn, and UC Berkeley Professor John Canny of surveillance blimp fame. Further investigations are planned.

LAG MOMMA LAG

I think they should investigate the *lag*. Because I'm betting that people need it. The economy needs it. Market psychology expects it. Instant pay-as-you-go doesn't appear to be the American way, even if everybody *does* love the Net. U.S. consumers prefer the personal touch—kitties and doggies, children's "art," lipstick kisses, and ducks in legwarmers holding flowers behind their backs. We're used to the lag, the delayed promise that might be false, the second-thought STOP PAYMENT. We count on it to get by. Net-based economic dreams may flower but check writers aren't up to transnational speed. Besides, how can I work up a good synapse with no gap? M2

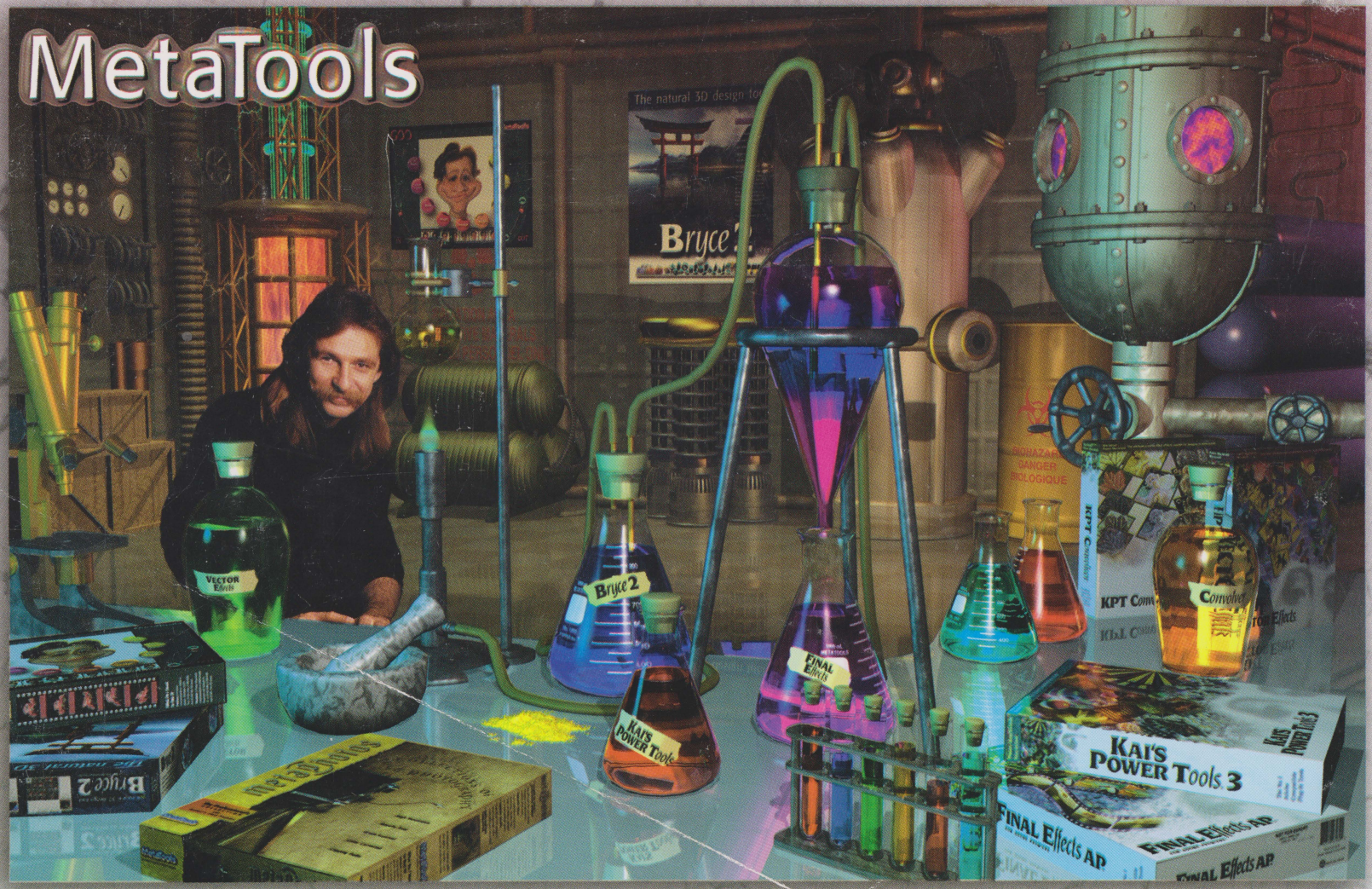
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